

# Constipation in children

- Constipation in children
- [Constipation in babies \(0 to 6 months\)](#)

This page provides information about constipation in children over 6 months old.

For information on babies up to 6 months see [constipation in babies \(0 to 6 months\)](#)

Constipation is when your child has a hard bowel movement, and it is difficult for them to poo.

Normal bowel movements should be bulky and soft. For some children, normal means doing a poo once a day or every second day.

Constipation is common and it affects children of all ages.

## Check if it's constipation

It may be constipation if your child:

- lacks energy
- is irritable, angry or unhappy
- soils their clothes
- has poo like 'rabbit droppings' or little pellets
- strains or has pain when they poo
- bleeds during or after having a poo, because their poo is large and hard
- has stomach pain that improves after they poo

If you are [breastfeeding](#) your baby, they may go a week without having a poo.

## How to treat your child's constipation

If you think your child may be constipated, take them to your GP. The treatment for constipation depends on your child's age.

The longer your child is constipated, the more difficult it can be for them to get back to normal. Make sure you get help early.

Diet, lifestyle changes and laxatives are often recommended for children who are eating solid foods.

It may take several months for the treatments to work, but keep trying until they do.

Laxative treatment may make your child's overflow soiling worse before it gets better.

When our child's constipation has been treated, it's important to stop it coming back. Your GP may recommend your child keeps taking laxatives for a while to make sure their poo stays soft enough to push out regularly.

## Treating constipation with soiling (children pooing their pants)

Being constipated and soiling their clothes is not something your child does on purpose. There's no reason to get cross with them.

You may both find the situation stressful. Try to stay calm and relaxed. This will help your child deal with the problem.

## Make changes to your child's diet

Give your baby extra water between their normal feeds if they haven't started to eat solid food yet. If you're using formula milk, do not add more water to the mixture.

Try gently moving your baby's legs in a bicycling motion or carefully massaging their tummy to help stimulate their bowels.

Give older children plenty of fluids and encourage them to eat fruit. Chop, blend or mash the food if it's easier for them to eat. The best fruits for constipation include apples, grapes, pears and strawberries.

Other high-fibre foods which can help constipation include:

- whole grain breakfast cereals, bread, pasta and rice
- vegetables
- baked beans

Do not force your child to eat as this can make mealtimes stressful.

## Physical activity

Encourage your child to be active. This will help to treat the constipation. It is also important for your child's general health, growth and development.

Children under the age of 5 who can walk on their own should be physically active for at least an hour each day.

[The START website has advice on physical activity for children](#)

## Bowel training

You might find it useful to encourage your child into a regular bowel pattern. You can do this by using

'bowel training'.

Ask your child to sit on the toilet 4 times a day for 5 minutes, even if nothing happens. You could try this after breakfast, after school, after dinner and before bed. Put a footstool under your child's feet so they are not dangling.

## Star charts

Some parents find star charts helpful.

Make a chart for the days of the week and give your child a star for:

- sitting on the toilet
- pooing in the toilet
- taking their laxatives
- washing their hands

Agree with your child a goal number of stars to get. Consider giving them a small reward when they reach their goal.

## Causes of constipation in children

Constipation usually happens when your child:

- first starts taking formula or processed foods as a baby
- is being potty trained as a toddler
- has just started school

The most common causes include:

- not eating enough fibre – such as fruit, vegetables and cereals
- not drinking enough fluids
- overfeeding – including giving babies too much milk
- fear or anxiety about using the toilet – at home or at school
- poor potty training – such as feeling pressured or being regularly interrupted

In much rarer cases, constipation in children may be caused by a medical condition.

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