

Management of Childhood Constipation and Soiling

How children and young people can be helped to resolve the problem of constipation and soiling.



Toileting

- Introduce a routine for going to the toilet i.e. after meals and allow time for trying to go. **Do not force the child onto the toilet.**
- Make the toilet area a pleasant, comfortable and safe place.
- If the child uses a potty or insists on using a nappy, encourage them to be used in the toilet area.
- Gradually encourage them to sit on the toilet: perhaps wearing nappy at first then progress to sitting on the toilet without a nappy.
- Involve the child in emptying their poo in the toilet and flushing it away (when toddlers see dirty nappies going into bins they do not realise the poo should go down the toilet).
- Give lots of **praise** for trying to use the toilet.
- Teach the child how to clean themselves and wash their hands. Make it fun, nice smelling soaps may help.
- Instant reward systems may help such as a silver star for sitting on the toilet and a gold star for a poo in the toilet.

Continuity and persistence is essential. Do not expect to achieve instant results you must be patient. Each child will be different and will progress at their own pace.

Correct toilet position

Ensure a comfortable toilet seat perhaps by using a toilet insert to make the child feel safe.

- A footstool at the correct height so that the knees are higher than the hips aids pushing.
- Leaning slightly forward elbows on knees also helps pushing.

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Correct position for toileting

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Dietary Tips

By increasing the child's daily intake of high fibre foods, fruit, vegetables and fluid, you will increase the water content of the stools and make them softer and easier to pass.

Fluid Intake

It is important to ensure children have an adequate fluid intake. Additional fluids may be needed during exercise or if the weather is hot.

Medication

The laxative medication the child has been prescribed are to ensure the poo is kept soft and easy to pass. Even when the child stops soiling it is important to continue the medication. It may be necessary to continue the medication for months or even years before the problem is resolved. Stopping the medication too early may result in the child becoming constipated again and the soiling restarting.

Tips to help a child

As well as giving a child their prescribed medication there are other things you can do to help.

- Remember to sit them on the toilet every day about 20 minutes after breakfast and supper for 5 minutes.
- Blowing bubbles, a party trumpet or blowing up a balloon can help to tighten the same tummy muscles used to have a poo, and may help to squeeze it out. **(Young children should have someone sitting with them when they do this as balloons can be dangerous and easily swallowed).**
- Watch for behaviours (squatting, crossing ankles, hiding, stiffening of body, flushing) that may indicate they need the toilet and ask them to sit on the toilet at those times as well.
- Make sure they are active and not sitting on the sofa all day.
- Try not to get anxious or angry about the problem.

