

Soiling (Encopresis)

Children with encopresis, also called soiling, can have either full bowel movements or leak a small amount of stool into their underclothes or on themselves. Soiling is very common, occurring in at least 2 out of 100 children.

What causes Encopresis?

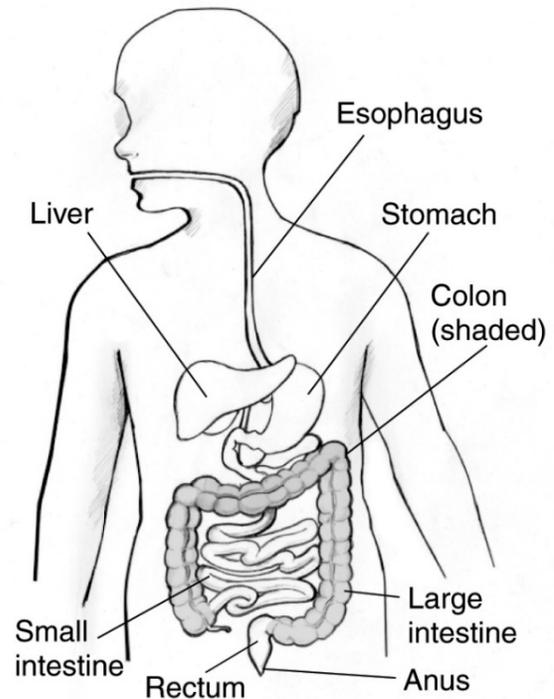
Soiling usually occurs with constipation. Constipation often begins when children hold their stool (“with-holding”) to prevent bowel movements. In order to hold in their poop younger children will tighten their bottoms, cry, scream, hide in corners, cross their legs, shake, get red in the face or dance around. Parents will often confuse these behaviors with trying to pass poop when it is usually the opposite. Some reasons that children start holding bowel movements or be at increased risk constipation include:

- Pain before, during, or after pooping
- Illnesses
- Hot weather
- Changes in diet and not drinking enough fluids (especially water)
- Travel
- Diaper rashes that cause pain when the child has a bowel movement
- Having to use bathrooms that offer less privacy than children than at home. This is especially important for older school-age children.
- Not taking the time out during play or other activities to go to the bathroom when children feel the urge to poop

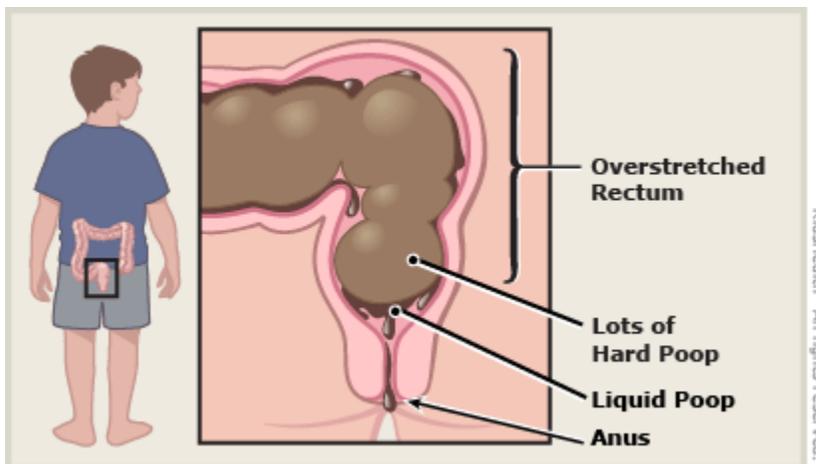
How does Encopresis Happen?

When children hold in their poop, the lower colon fills up. Over time this can cause the rectum and lower colon to stretch out of their normal shape and lead to large hard stool balls in the rectum.

The more a child holds in poop, the more the colon stretches allowing the poop to become larger and harder. This makes pooping even more painful. When this happens over and over again, the colon becomes so stretched and floppy that the muscles children use to help push out poop do not work well.



Soiling happens when hard poop can get stuck and only liquid can pass around the hard poop. The stretched nerves become less sensitive and the child does not feel the leaking poop.



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Children who have emotional or behavioral issues can have trouble with soiling. There are more serious medical problems that children are born with that can cause encopresis, but these are rare. Your health care team will talk with you more about these causes if indicated.

What are some signs of soiling?

Some children will hold their poop in for many days then pass a very large, hard stool. This poop can be so large that it clogs the toilet but children will also leak liquid poop at the same time. Often parents of children who soil will share that their children use a lot of toilet paper trying to clean themselves. Some children will refuse to poop in the toilet at all.

Other things you can see in children who soil:

- They may hide their soiled underwear or clothes
- Children who have trouble with soiling often cannot feel or even smell that they have soiled, even if others can.
- They may also have trouble with bedwetting or have urine accidents
- Children may get teased causing them to not want to go to school or to play with friends

How is Encopresis diagnosed?

Your doctor or nurse practitioner will examine your child and obtain a medical history. Testing is rarely required but might include:

- Abdominal x-ray - a test to evaluate the amount of stool in the large intestine.
- Contrast enema - a test that checks the intestine for blockage, narrow areas and other abnormalities.

How is it treated?

Treatment for soiling will be guided by child's healthcare team with you and your child's input.

Treatment includes:

- Cleaning the hard stool out of the lower colon
- Keeping bowel movements soft so the stool will pass easily
- Toilet sitting for 5 minute periods three times a day, usually after meals
- Retraining the intestine and rectum to gain control over bowel movements

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