

Treating Constipation: Tips for Success

There is no quick fix for constipation, for this reason it is very important that you develop a routine and stick to it. Long-term success depends on how well you can follow the care plan. This treatment will take many months of hard work for you and your child.

Medications

Your child's doctor or nurse practitioner may prescribe medications to help keep your child's bowel movements soft. It is very important for your child to take these medicines. They have two purposes:

1. They help your child to have regular, soft, and painless bowel movement.
2. Over time it will help the colon to return to its normal shape and function and muscle tone. Please **do not** give your child stool softeners without the approval of a doctor or nurse practitioner.

Diet and Exercise Changes

Diet

Making these dietary changes can help your child with both the constipation and soiling:

- Add more fruits and vegetables (increased fiber)
- Add more whole grain cereals and breads (increased fiber)
 - Diets high in fiber usually help but can worsen constipation if your child does not drink enough water with a high fiber diet. Check with your health care provider about how much fiber your child needs every day.
- Encourage your child to drink more fluids, especially water
 - Limit sugary drinks like juice, soda, colas, and punch

- Limit fast foods and junk foods that are high in fats and simple sugars
- Limit whole milk to 16 ounces a day for children over 2 years of age
 - Our goal is to get stool moving through the intestine and prevent constipation, but foods higher in fat like fast food and whole milk slow down digestion leading to slower movement of stool through the intestine.

Meal scheduling

Plan to serve your child's meals on a regular schedule. Often, eating a meal will cause children to feel the urge to poop (called the gastrocolic reflex) This is because when you fill the stomach, the colon contracts. Serve breakfast early so your child does not have to rush off to school and miss the opportunity to poop.

Exercise

Increasing the amount of exercise children get can also help. Exercise helps digest food by pushing food forward in the intestines. Encourage your child to do activities that require them to move around, rather than activities where they are sitting (watching TV and playing video/computer games).

What bowel habits should I teach my child?

- Encourage your child to sit on the toilet at least twice a day for 3-5 minutes, preferably 15-30 minutes after a meal. Make this time pleasant. Do not scold or criticize the child if they are unable to poop.
- Giving stickers or other small rewards and making posters that chart your child's progress can help motivate and encourage them.
- Until the lower colon regains muscle tone, children may still soil. Pre-school children may be able to wear a disposable training pant until they regain bowel control.

- Taking a change of underwear or pants to school can help decrease your child's embarrassment and improve their self-esteem as bowel control improves.
- Talk to school teachers about your child's need to be able to go to the bathroom at any time. Many children prefer privacy in bathrooms and will avoid going to the bathroom at school.

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