

Constipation and soiling

A guide for parents



Constipation and soiling

A parent's guide

The aim of this guide is to support what your doctor has told you today about your child's constipation and soiling.

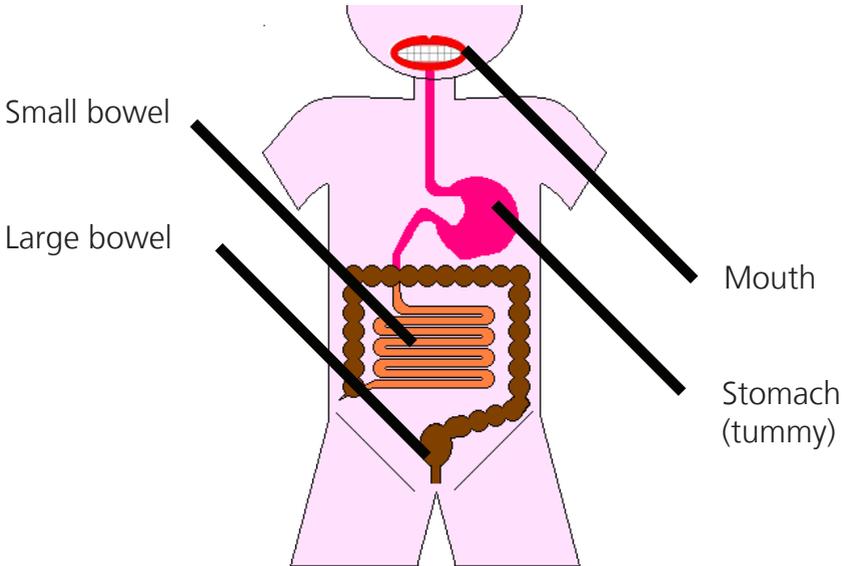
It aims to answer some of the questions you might have:

- How does the body work?
- What happens when my child is constipated?
- How do the laxatives (medicine) work?
- How can I help my child?
- How can I get them to sit on the toilet?

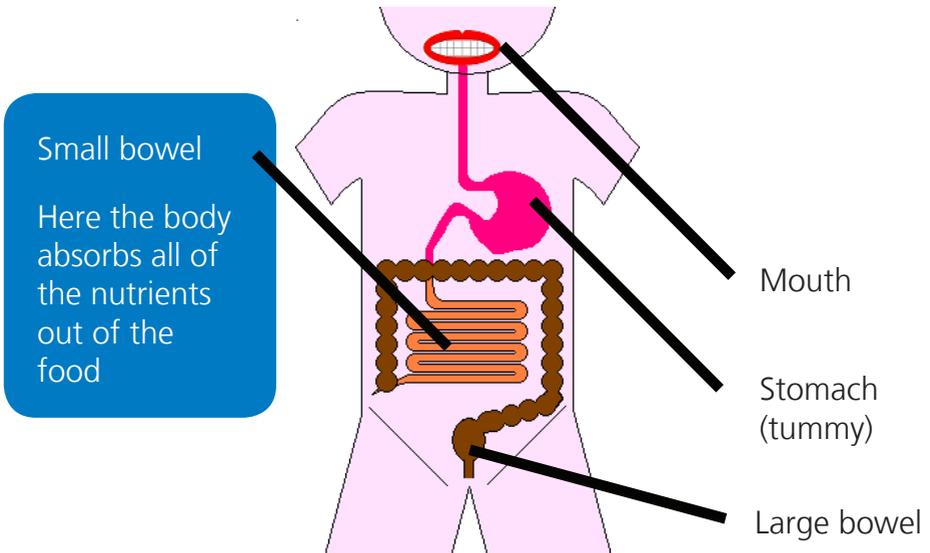


How does the body work?

Here are the important parts of the digestive system:

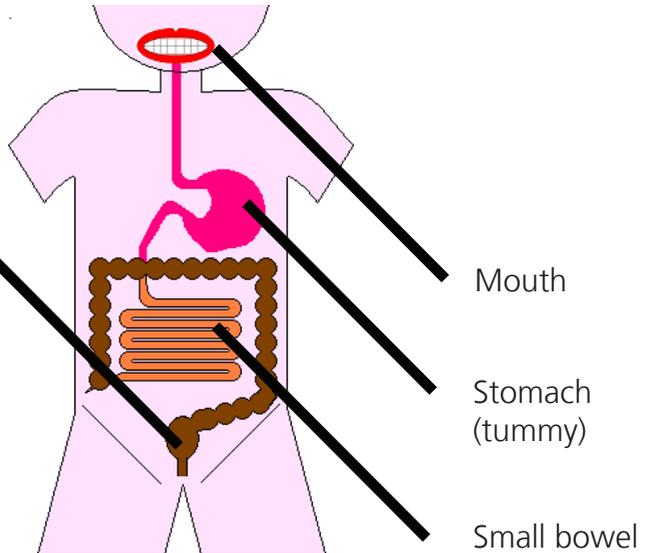


These diagrams show what the bowel does:



Large bowel

This is where the body absorbs the water out of the food, before squashing it into poo and storing the poo until it is passed in the toilet



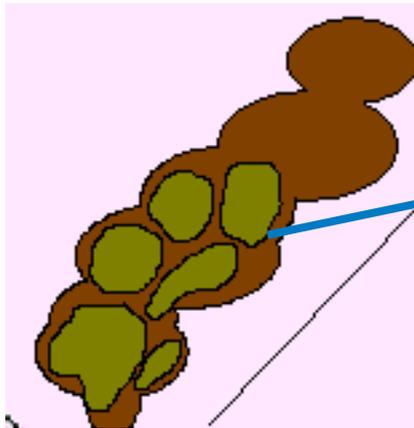
Once the bowel is full of poo, it stretches the special muscles in the bowel wall a little, and this sends a message to the brain saying “go to the toilet to have a poo”.

Normally this is first felt in the tummy area in front but if this signal is ignored or suppressed too many times, for example because it is not a convenient time or place to have a poo, the next feeling that a poo is needed will come from the bottom area when very little time is left to get to the toilet on time!

What happens when my child is constipated?

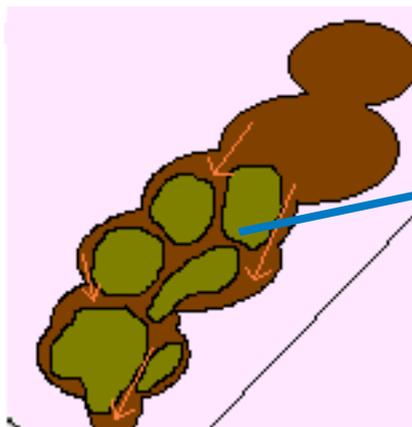
When your child gets constipated, the poo in the large bowel becomes harder and bigger, and is difficult to push out on the toilet.

Very stretched
bowel wall



Big lumps of
hard poo that
have got stuck

It gets bigger and stretches the special muscles in the bowel wall so much that they stop sending the message to the brain telling them to go to the toilet. This blockage by the hard poo still allows runnier poo from further back in the bowel to leak past.



The orange
arrows show
the runny poo
leaking past

Because the brain does not know they need a poo, they may not realise that the poo is going to leak out until it does so.

How do the laxatives work?

The laxatives (medicine) that the doctor or specialist nurse gives you are very important, because they help to clear the big lumps of hard poo that have formed. If these big lumps are out of the way, no poo can leak past, so then their pants will be clean. The bowel need to gets back to its normal unstretched state so that it can send messages to the brain again.

Even when your child stops soiling, it is important to continue the medicine. It is likely that they may have to continue taking it for a year or more, but it does not do your child any harm and stopping it too early will result in your child becoming constipated again, and the soiling restarting. Stopping the medicine too early, even after several months, is the most frequent cause of relapse. The bowel will take many months or a few years to return to its unstretched state.

Fibre, which is found in fruit and veg, helps the laxatives by helping to make poo softer and helping stop hard poo building up again. Try to make sure your child has five portions (one portion = around the size of a fist) of different fruit and veg a day.



How can I help my child?

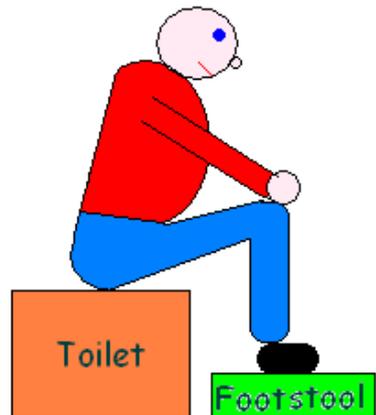
As well as giving your child their medication, there are other things you can do to help them stop soiling:

1. Sit your child on the toilet four or five times a day.
2. Many children spend too little time sitting on the toilet, so it might help to set an alarm on a clock/oven/watch for five minutes, and let them get off the toilet once it beeps. Reward staying on the toilet for the full 5 minutes with a star on their star chart.
3. 5-15 minutes after they have eaten a meal or had a snack is a good time to sit them on the toilet, as the body's natural reflexes often allow them to have a poo at this time.
4. Give a copy of the toilet-sitting times to other caregivers the child sees throughout the day, such as childminders, grandparents and nursery staff, to make sure everyone is keeping to the times you have chosen.
5. Watch for behaviour/grimaces/poses (such as crossing their legs) that might indicate they need the toilet, and ask them to sit on the toilet at those times as well.
6. Give praise if they ask to go to the toilet or go to the toilet un-reminded but if accidents occur, help them to clean themselves up, and try not to shout or tell them off.
7. Milk can make constipation worse, so try and make sure your child doesn't have more than one pint of milk (including milk products) a day.
8. Make sure they are active and not sitting on the sofa the whole day long.
9. It is also important to make sure your child is drinking plenty of water, or very dilute squash if they don't like water, as this will help soften the poo too. You should aim for at least 2-3 pints of fluid a day. This also helps their concentration!

How can I get them to sit properly on the toilet?

Once your child is sitting on the toilet, you could:

1. Have a special toy that they are only allowed to play with whilst they are on the toilet.
2. Read them a story or sing songs along with a radio/tape/cd.
3. Encourage them to push some poo out if they can. If they do some in the first couple of minutes, praise them and ask them to sit there for the rest of the 5 minutes, because they may do some more.
4. Ask them to blow bubbles, blow up a balloon or blow a party trumpet – this tightens the same tummy muscles that they use to have a poo, and may help them squeeze it out. (Always make sure you are sitting with them when they do this though as balloons can be dangerous and easily swallowed by young children).
5. Have a special box/step/stool to help them climb on and off the toilet that they can rest their feet on whilst they sit there. It is much easier for them to do a big push to have a poo if their feet are supported and not dangling in the air.
6. Once the five minutes have finished, help them wipe their bottom, flush the toilet and wash their hands so that they learn and practice good hygiene habits.
7. If your child is scared when flushing the toilet, add some food colouring (that you use just for this purpose) to the water in the cistern just before they flush.



You may not realise how common constipation and soiling is, but research has shown that 3% of children aged 5 yrs (3 children in every 100 children) suffer from it. So, although you may not be aware of it (children do not discuss this problem with their friends) there will be at least one other child in your child's school that is going through the same thing.

It is very important to remember that your child wants to stop soiling as much as you want them to stop, and although it is very frustrating when your child soils, they are not doing it on purpose. Some children may hide behind a sofa or in the corner when they are soiling; this is because they are embarrassed that they do not have enough warning to get to the toilet, not because they are soiling on purpose. They may also hide their dirty underwear from you, as they may be embarrassed by this too, but it is very important not to get angry by this behaviour. Work out a strategy with your child about where they can put their dirty underwear such as a special wash basket in their bedroom so that they do not hide them somewhere else.

Try preparing a pack that your child can keep in their school bag, that contains clean underwear and some baby wipes for example, so that they can clean themselves up at school.

Bristol Stool Chart

Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
Type 2		Sausage shaped – but lumpy
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on its surface
Type 4		Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
Type 5		Soft blobs with clear cut edges (passed easily)
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces. Entirely liquid

Hopefully, once the medication is working, your child’s poo should look like type 3 or type 4.

DAY	TYPE OF STOOL 1-7	SIZE (SMALL, MEDIUM, LARGE)	USED TOILET TIME	SOILED PAD/ PANTS TIME	MEDICATION	HOW MANY DRINKS?	FIBRE RICH FOOD EATEN?
MON							
TUES							
WED							
THURS							
FRI							
SAT							
SUN							



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