

Constipation and children

What is constipation

Constipation is the passing of a hard bowel motion (poo), causing pain and discomfort. Constipation is not about how often a child goes to the toilet. Some children may only do poo one or two times a week, and others will poo every day.

If a child is constipated their poo will be hard and it will hurt when they go to the toilet. They may complain about having a pain in the tummy and show signs of "holding on", such as crossing their legs and refusing to sit on the toilet.

Sometimes children who are constipated have runny poo that leaks out around the solid lump of poo and the child will dirty their pants. This is called "soiling".

What causes constipation

There are many things that may cause constipation including:

- What a child eats. Some children lack fibre in their diet. This may be due to drinking too much milk and not getting enough solids.
- Not drinking enough liquid, especially water.
- When a child puts off going to the toilet because they are busy or it hurts, or they hold on for too long.
- Not being active enough.
- Some medications.
- If a baby is formula fed and there is too much formula added for the amount of water.

What you can do

- Give the child more fruit and vegetables, cereals, rice and bread to increase the amount of fibre in their diet. Be careful not to give too much fibre as this will cause problems. Increase the fibre gradually.
- Encourage children to have lots of water to drink.
- Get your child up and active.
- Check the baby formula is correctly made up, with the correct amount of formula for the amount of water.
- Establish a regular toilet routine and give rewards or use "star charts".
- Try to prevent constipation or solve it quickly. The longer the child is constipated the harder it is to treat.
- See a doctor if constipation is a problem.

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