



Fact sheet

Centre for Community Child Health

Constipation and encopresis

Constipation is pretty common for children; around a third will experience it.

For younger children and babies, bottle-feeding is more commonly associated with constipation than breast-feeding. If your formula-fed baby is constipated, it's a good idea to double-check that formula has been correctly made up because concentrated formula can lead to constipation. When your child is weaning on to solids and when your child is toilet training can also be times when constipation is more likely.

Constipation in a baby is indicated by dry, crumbly poo or pellet-like poo. Baby poo should be about the consistency of toothpaste or even softer. Your baby might look like they are in pain during a poo. However, going red in the face and straining during a poo is normal for babies and not a sign of constipation, unless there is also hard poo.

After toilet-training age, your child might experience constipation for a range of reasons—too busy playing for a toilet break, because it hurts to go to the toilet, or because they do not want to use the toilets at preschool or kindergarten. If your child has had any large, hard poos before, this can lead to small tears in their anus, called fissures, these can then make future poos hurt. Some children will then avoid the toilet because it hurts.

Managing constipation

To manage constipation, your child needs a diet that provides food that offers healthy fibre; adequate clear fluids, but not excessive; and encouragement to poo when they feel the 'need to go' sensation. It's really important to take a supportive approach, not a punitive one, as this is more likely to be effective.

Good foods include wholegrain breads and cereals, wholemeal pasta, brown rice, fruit and vegetables, dried fruit and peanut butter. High fibre diets or fibre supplements are not a great idea as they can actually bulk up your child's poos, making them more difficult and uncomfortable to pass. It's also important for your child to get regular exercise.

Correct toilet position

Having the feet flat on the floor while on the toilet can help. If a child is too little to reach the floor with flat feet, you might like to pop a small stool in the bathroom that your child can rest their feet on.

Encouraging healthy bowels

Helping your child and family to maintain healthy bowels has lots of benefits. A healthy, varied diet; regular exercise and adequate clear fluids are all essential. If you're ever worried about your baby or child's poos or bowels, don't hesitate to speak with your child and family health nurse or GP, just to check that things are okay.

You can find out more information about constipation on the Raising Children Network, <http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/constipation.html>

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Photo: Dr Jeffrey Braithwaite, Foundation Director, Australian Institute of Health Innovation, University of New South Wales receiving his 2013 Bupa Health Foundation Health Award from Mr John Conde AO, Chairman, Bupa Health Foundation and Dr Christine Bennett, Chair, Bupa Health Foundation Steering Committee

COMMUNITY PAEDIATRIC REVIEW

\$2 million for health research initiatives Bupa Health Foundation awards

The Bupa Health Foundation has announced a \$2 million boost to Australian health research and implementation programs that will benefit a range of areas including cancer, children's health and access to health services in rural communities.

Research recognised at the awards included the CareTrack Kids study to assess the standard of healthcare delivery to children, with the aim of identifying and investigating gaps in appropriate care that children are receiving.

Other key areas were:

- Australian-first research into operative childbirth and understanding the developmental and long term impact of caesarean vs. vaginal birth
- a pilot clinical consultation program with Royal Far West to enable access to specialist speech technicians in rural Australia

- research to better understand prevalence and severity of menopausal symptoms, depression, sexual dysfunction and sleep disturbance, which could influence best practice treatment guidelines for women in mid-life.

Bupa Health Foundation Steering Committee member, Dr Paul Bates said: "Australia's researchers are some of the world's best, and we're really proud to support initiatives which can make a real difference in tackling the nation's key healthcare issues.

"This year we are focussing strongly on turning evidence into action by supporting programs which not only test new ideas but also provide practical and tangible research outcomes."

The Foundation's long-standing commitment to improving the health of the Australian community has seen it contribute over \$21 million over eight years to health research and health programs across its key focus areas: wellbeing, managing chronic disease, healthy ageing, empowering people about their health; and promoting affordable healthcare.

About Bupa Health Foundation

Bupa Health Foundation helps build a healthier Australian community through its support of important health research, health education and other healthy living programs. Established as a charitable foundation in 2005, the Bupa Health Foundation has partnered in over 80 initiatives nationally, with a combined investment of around \$21 million, across its key focus areas: wellbeing, managing chronic disease, healthy ageing, empowering people about their health; and promoting affordable healthcare.

www.bupa.com.au/foundation

