

Constipation

Constipation is a very common problem in kids. A child is considered constipated when he or she has fewer than three bowel movements in a week; has trouble having a bowel movement; or when the stool (poop) is hard, dry, and unusually large. Constipation usually isn't a cause for concern, and easy to avoid by adopting healthy eating and exercise habits.

Causes of Constipation

Constipation usually is due to a diet that doesn't include enough water and [fiber](#), which help the bowels move properly. Kids who eat lots of processed foods, cheeses, white bread and bagels, and meats may become constipated fairly often. Eating a healthier diet with high-fiber foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can keep stool from getting hard and dry.

Some kids avoid going to the bathroom, even when they really have the urge to go. They might ignore internal urges because they don't want to use a restroom away from home, stop playing a fun game, or have to ask an adult to be excused to go to the bathroom. Ignoring the urge to go makes it harder to go later. [Stress](#) also can lead to constipation. Kids can get constipated when they're anxious about something, like starting at a new school or problems at home.

Symptoms of Constipation

Keep in mind that different kids have different bathroom habits. A child who doesn't have a bowel movement every day isn't necessarily constipated. One child might go three times a day, while another might go once every 3 days.

Generally, signs of constipation in kids include:

- going less than usual
- having trouble or pain when going to the bathroom
- feeling full or bloated
- straining to poop
- seeing a little blood on the toilet paper

It's also common for kids with constipation to sometimes stain their underwear with bits of stool.

Dealing With Constipation

To prevent and treat constipation:

- **Give your child more fluids.** Drinking enough water and other liquids helps stools move more easily through the intestines. The amount of fluids kids need will vary according to weight and age. But most school-age kids need at least 3 to 4 glasses of water each day. If the constipation lasts or is upsetting your child, it may be due to a health problem, so call your doctor.
- **Serve more fiber.** High-fiber foods (such as fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain bread) can help prevent constipation. When adding more fiber to your child's diet, do so slowly over a few weeks and make sure your child also drinks more fluids. Fiber doesn't have to be a turn-off for kids — try apples, pears, beans, oatmeal, oranges, ripe bananas, whole-grains breads, and popcorn.
- **Make sure kids get enough exercise.** Physical activity nudges the bowels into action, so encourage your kids to get plenty of exercise. It can be as simple as playing catch, riding bikes, or shooting a few hoops.
- **Develop a regular meal schedule.** Since eating is a natural stimulant for the bowels, regular meals may help develop routine bowel habits. Give your child a chance for a relaxed visit to the bathroom before school.
- **Get kids into the habit of going.** If your child fights the urge to go to the bathroom, have him or her sit on the toilet for at least 10 minutes at about the same time each day (ideally, after a meal).

Notes from the Nurse: _____

