

How can I help my child with constipation?

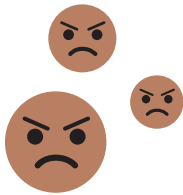


Constipation is a common problem in children characterized by infrequent, painful or hard-to-pass stools. Many children avoid toileting because they are busy with other activities or reluctant to use unfamiliar toilets. Some start withholding after a painful episode of constipation, which can create a vicious circle.



What are the signs & symptoms?

- Two bowel movements or fewer in a two-week period
- Abdominal pain or pain during bowel movements
- Large stools that clog the toilet
- Poor appetite and crankiness
- Bleeding from the anus caused by passing hard stool
- Bowel movements that are hard, pebbly and difficult to pass



What's the fiber gram rule? "Age + 5"

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommends that daily consumption of fiber be "age plus 5" grams for children. A 7-year-old child, for example, should get "7 plus 5" = 12 grams of fiber a day.

What are fiber rich foods?

Fruits: prunes, pears, apples, raspberries, blackberries

Vegetables: broccoli, winter squash, sweet potatoes, green peas

Whole grains & legumes: pinto beans, navy beans, kidney beans, lentils, whole wheat, rye, bran

Nuts & seeds: almond, pistachios, peanuts, walnuts, pecans

What can I do at home?

Diet and nutrition

- Serve more fiber-rich food
- Increase liquid intake
- Avoid processed food



Exercise

Exercise helps constipation by decreasing the time it takes food to move through the large intestine.

Behavioral changes

- Regular toilet time – first thing in the morning and after every meal
- Make your bathroom kid-friendly to reinforce a positive experience

Medications

Over-the-counter enemas, laxatives and oral therapies can be given at home as directed by a child's healthcare provider. A child who doesn't respond to treatment needs to be admitted to the hospital.

When to see a doctor



Constipation in children is not usually serious. Chronic constipation, however, may lead to complications or in rare cases signal an underlying condition.

If your child soils him or herself by passing stool anywhere other than the toilet, your child may suffer from chronic constipation, and should be evaluated by a doctor.