

Constipation



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What Is Constipation?

Constipation is a very common problem in kids and is usually not a cause for concern. Healthy eating and exercise habits can help prevent it.

Constipation is defined by the following:

- having fewer than 2 bowel movements (poops) in a week
- having dry, hard, or difficult-to-pass poops (Bristol type 1-2 on the chart above)
- feeling that some of the poop has not passed.

What Are the Signs & Symptoms of Constipation?

- going poo less than usual
- having trouble or pain when pooping
- feeling full or bloated
- straining to poop
- seeing a little blood on the toilet paper after pooping
- Stain their underwear with bits of poop, that sometimes looks like diarrhea.

What Causes Constipation?

- Not enough water and/or fiber in the diet. Both are needed for poop to form properly and come out easily.
- Eating lots of processed foods (eg. Cheese, white bread, bagels) and not enough fruits and vegetables
- Changes in a child's diet eg. moving from breast milk to baby formula or from baby food to solid food.

Bristol stool chart

Looks like	Description
	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: ideal consistency, 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

- Taking some medications like antidepressants, pain medicines, and iron supplements can lead to constipation.
- Holding poop in when a child has the urge to go. This often happens during toilet training in the toddler years or in older children when they ignore the urge to go for various reasons. Some common reasons older children ignore the urge to go poop are because they do not want to use a restroom away from home, stop playing a fun game, or must ask an adult to be excused to go to the bathroom. Ignoring the urge to go makes it harder to go later and can lead to constipation.
- Stress can also lead to constipation. Kids can get constipated when they're anxious about something, like starting at new school or problems at home. Research has shown that emotional upsets can affect how well the gut works and can cause constipation and other conditions, like diarrhea.
- Some kids get constipated because of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), which can happen when they're stressed-out or when they eat certain trigger foods, which often are fatty or spicy. A child with IBS may have constipation or diarrhea, stomach pain and gas.
- In rare cases, constipation is a sign of other medical illnesses. Talk to your doctor if your child continues to have problems or if the constipation lasts for 2 to 3 weeks.

How Can Constipation be prevented and treated?

1. **Give your child more liquids.** Drinking enough water and other liquids helps poop move more easily through the intestines. The amount kids need will vary based on their weight and age. Most school-age kids need at least 3 to 4 glasses of water each day. If your infant is constipated during the move from breastmilk or to solid foods, try serving just a few ounces (2–4) of apple, pear, or prune juice each day. If the constipation continues even after increasing fluids for a few days or seems to bother your child, call your doctor to schedule a visit.
2. **Increase fiber in your child's diet.** High-fiber foods (such as fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain bread) can help prevent constipation. Fiber cannot be digested, so it helps clean out the intestines by moving the bowels along. A diet full of fatty, sugary, or starchy foods can slow the bowels down. When you add more fiber to your child's diet, do so slowly over a few weeks and make sure your child also drinks more liquids. Fiber does not have to be a turn-off for kids. Some foods you could consider trying include: apples, pears, beans, oatmeal, oranges, ripe bananas, whole-grains breads, and popcorn. Adding flax meal or bran to homemade fruit smoothies is another way to add fiber.
3. **Develop a regular meal schedule.** Eating is a natural stimulant for the bowels, so regular meals may help kids develop routine bowel habits. If needed, schedule breakfast a little earlier to give your child a chance for a relaxed visit to the bathroom before school.
4. **Get kids into the habit of going poop regularly.** If your child fights the urge to go to the bathroom, have them sit on the toilet for at least 10 minutes at about the same time each day (ideally, after a meal).

5. **Encourage your kids to get enough exercise.** Physical activity helps the bowels get into action, so encourage your kids to get plenty of exercise. It can be as simple as walking, playing catch, riding bikes, or shooting a few hoops.

These small changes help most kids feel better and get their bowels moving the way they should. Talk with the doctor before giving your child any kind of over-the-counter medicine for constipation.