

# ADVICE FOR CHILDREN WITH CONSTIPATION



## HOW DOES THE BOWEL WORK?

- >> The food we eat gets mashed around in the *stomach* and turns into a soupy mixture.
- >> This moves into the *small bowel*, where all the nutrients (the good stuff) are taken out to be used by the body to keep us healthy.
- >> As it travels along the *large bowel*, water is absorbed and the poo turns into a smooth sausage shape ready to be passed.
- >> The poo in the large bowel moves along every time the gut muscles squeeze.
- >> When the poo reaches the *rectum*, the rectum stretches and that sends a message to the brain saying we need a poo.

## WHAT CAN GO WRONG?

- >> If we don't respond to this message, the poo just stays there.
- >> The gut muscles keep squeezing so more poo arrives, as poo builds up in the large bowel more water is absorbed, and the poo becomes harder and gets stuck.
- >> Messages are only sent to the brain when the rectum stretches. If it stays stretched, you won't get a new message telling you need a poo.
- >> Very soon you have got a poo traffic jam, also known as **constipation**.

**\*\*Constipation is very common in children, it affects 1 in 3 children, even babies. Don't wait for it to get better by itself. TAKE ACTION!**

# POO CHECKER - WHAT'S YOUR POO TELLING YOU?



## TYPE 1

**Small hard lumps** like rabbit droppings.  
*This suggests severe constipation.*



## TYPE 2

**Sausage shaped**, but hard and lumpy.  
*This suggests constipation.*



## TYPE 3

**Sausage shaped**, but hard, with cracks on the surface.  
*This suggests constipation.*



## TYPE 4

**A soft, smooth sausage - THE IDEAL POO!**



## TYPE 5

**Separate soft blobs**  
*May be fine if the child is well and softer poos can be accounted for e.g. increased intake of fibre or taking laxative.*



## TYPE 6

**A mushy stool**  
*May be fine if the child is well and softer poos can be accounted for e.g. increased intake of fibre or taking laxative.*



## TYPE 7

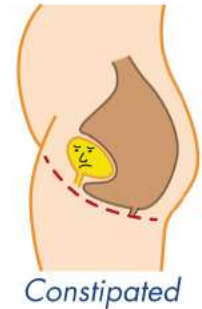
**A liquid stool**  
*This could be diarrhoea or overflow.*

\*Based on the Bristol Stool Form Scale produced by Dr KW Heaton, Reader in Medicine at the University of Bristol.

## HOW CAN YOU TELL IF A CHILD IS CONSTIPATED?

- >> Children should pass soft poo every day, or at least every other day.
- >> Passing types 1 - 3 means poo is sitting in a traffic jam.
- >> Pooing fewer than 4 times a week also means poo is in a traffic jam.
- >> Pooing more than 3 times a day can be a sign that the bowel is full, and is leaking out a bit at a time.
- >> Soiling - it might be hard bits, soft stuff or even liquid bypassing the traffic jam, called overflow. The child won't have any control over this.

- >> Big poos, or lots of poo all at once.
- >> Tummy ache or pain when they poo.
- >> Distended/swollen tummy.
- >> Really smelly poo/wind, or bad breath.
- >> They might not feel like eating, or even feel sick.
- >> The full bowel might press on the bladder and cause frequent small wees/urgency/day or night time wetting/ Urinary tract infections.



**Having just 2 of these symptoms means constipation!**

## HOW TO TREAT CONSTIPATION

- >> Keep a *Poo Diary* for 2 weeks: what it looks like, how much, where it goes.
- >> See your GP:
  - Take the poo diary and tell them all your child's symptoms
  - The GP should examine your child and ask questions to find out if the constipation could be caused by an underlying condition
  - The GP should prescribe a macrogol laxative like Movicol, Laxido or CosmoCol which softens poo and helps move it along (as per *NICE Guidelines*)

## TAKING LAXATIVES

- >> The macrogol must be mixed with the right amount of water first, but then other food/drink can be added – read: *How to prepare macrogol laxatives.*
- >> Most children start with disimpaction – this means taking lots of medicine to clear out the backlog of poo – read: *A Parent's Guide to Disimpaction.*
- >> When the bowel is clear they will need to keep taking a smaller dose each day to keep their poo soft and moving along.
- >> Your child might need to stay on laxatives for a long time, but don't worry, laxatives won't hurt them. However, in the long term, undertreating constipation will.



## GETTING THE POO IN THE LOO

- >> Get there at the right time - 20 to 30 minutes after meals and before bed.
- >> Sit in the right way - feet flat and firmly supported on a box or stool, knees above hips. Secure sitting position - they might need a children's toilet seat.
- >> RELAX to let the poo out. So keep toys, games and books beside the toilet.



### TRY TO MAKE EACH TOILET SIT 'ACTIVE' BY ALTERNATING PLAY ACTIVITIES AND EXERCISES:

- >> Massaging the tummy in clockwise circles, and rocking forwards and backwards on the toilet can really help.
- >> Laugh/cough/blow to help push down with the tummy muscles.
- >> Make it a fun time! Look at ERIC's [Toileting Reward Chart](#) for more ideas to motivate your child. A 10 - 15 minute toilet sit should be long enough.

## PROMOTING A HEALTHY BOWEL

- >> Encourage your child to drink 6 - 8 water based drinks every day.
- >> Include fruit and vegetables in their diet.
- >> Exercise and move around!

## MORE INFO

- >> Visit ERIC's [Guide to Children's Bowel Problems](#)
- >> Visit [Pooper Highway animation](#)
- >> Visit [Flowchart – Constipation](#)
- >> Visit [Helpline Podcasts](#)