

Paediatric department

# Constipation in children

Constipation is a very common problem in childhood.

Often there is no particular reason for it, but it can be upsetting for you and your child.

This leaflet describes what can be done to help.

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## What is constipation?

Children are constipated if they pass hard painful poo, if they have infrequent poo (less than 3 times per week), or a combination of both. Doctors sometimes use the word 'stools' to describe poo.

Your child may be constipated if

- They have not done a poo at least 3 times in the last week
- Their poo is large and hard (type 2 or 3 in the diagram)
- Their poo looks like 'rabbit droppings' or little pellets (type 1)
- They are straining and in pain when they poo
- They are bleeding during or after having a poo because their poo is large and hard
- They have a poor appetite or stomach pain which gets better after a poo
- If your child has runny poo (diarrhoea) leaking round hard constipated poo, which may soil pants (“overflow soiling”).

THE BRISTOL STOOL FORM SCALE (for children)  
**choose your**

# Poo!

type <b>1</b>		looks like: <b>rabbit droppings</b> Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
type <b>2</b>		looks like: <b>bunch of grapes</b> Sausage-shaped but lumpy
type <b>3</b>		looks like: <b>corn on cob</b> Like a sausage but with cracks on its surface
type <b>4</b>		looks like: <b>sausage</b> Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
type <b>5</b>		looks like: <b>chicken nuggets</b> Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (passed easily)
type <b>6</b>		looks like: <b>porridge</b> Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
type <b>7</b>		looks like: <b>gravy</b> Watery, no solid pieces ENTIRELY LIQUID

# What causes constipation?

Constipation can happen for many reasons with children, but sometimes there is no obvious cause. It may be that your child has been ill and may have had a fever and been drinking less. Or your child just may not have been drinking enough fluids or having enough fibre in their diet from fruit and vegetables.

This table is a guide of how much fluid children should be drinking.

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Infant 0-6 mths	700mls(milk)	700mls(milk)
Babies 7-12 mths	600mls	600mls
Children 1-3 yrs	900mls	900mls
Children 4-8 yrs	1200mls	1200mls
Children 9-13 yrs	1800mls	1600mls
14-18 year olds	2600mls	1800mls

Sometimes children get constipated when they are stressed about potty or toilet training. Or something else may be worrying them, like school or nursery.

Children who are less physically active (because of their lifestyle or because they have a disability) are more likely to suffer with constipation.

# What should I do?

If you think that your child may be constipated, it's best to talk to their GP soon. Treatment works better if it's started early.

Laxatives are often recommended for children who are eating solid foods, together with advice about diet and exercise.

Laxatives help soften and regulate poo which makes it easier for your child to pass the stools. There are lots of different laxatives but the most commonly used are Movicol or Laxido.

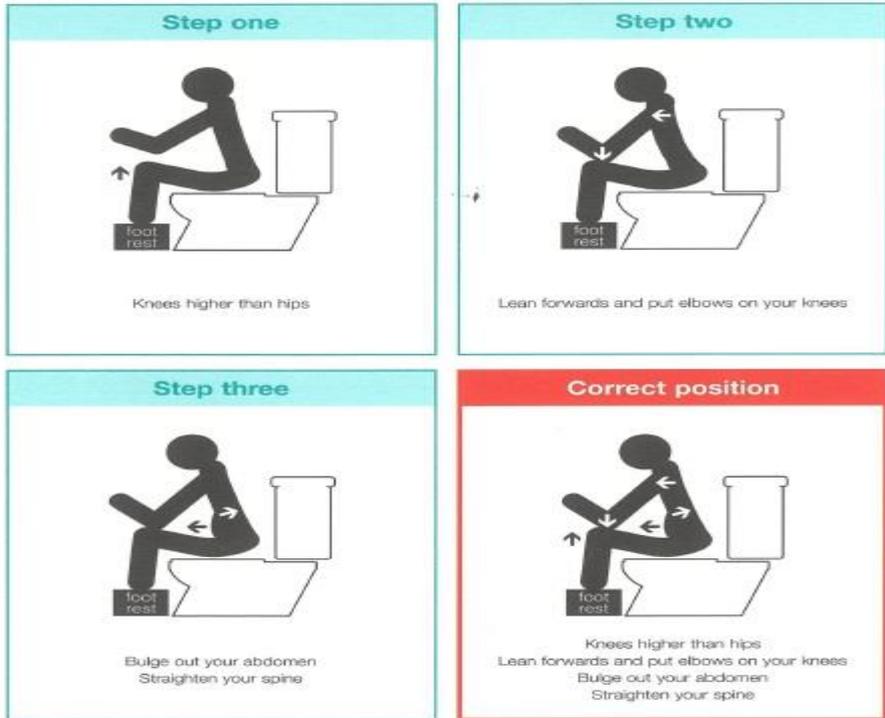
It may take several months for treatment to work, and laxatives may make your child's overflow soiling worse before it gets better.

Once your child's constipation is under control your child's GP may advise to keep taking the treatment for a while longer, to make sure everything is back to normal.

## What else can I do to help my child?

- Make sure your child has plenty to drink: 6-8 glasses of water/squash a day.
- Encourage your child to eat a high fibre diet. Foods with high fibre include fruit, vegetables, high-fibre bread, baked beans, and wholegrain breakfast cereals.
- Encourage your child to be physically active. For some ideas on how to do this, check out the following website <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/activities>
- Try to get your child into a regular toilet habit after meals or before bed and praise them whether they poo or not. This is particularly important for potty-trained boys, who may forget about pooing once they are weeing standing up.
- Make sure your child can rest their feet flat on the floor or a step when they're using the potty or toilet, so that their knees are higher than their hips. Encourage them to also lean forward a bit. This helps get them in a good position for pooing.
- ***Stay calm, allow plenty of time so they don't feel stressed or rushed.***

## Correct position for opening your bowels



Reproduced by the kind permission of Ray Addison, Nurse Consultant in Bladder and Bowel Dysfunction,  
Wendy Ness, Colorectal Nurse Specialist.

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This picture shows a good position to sit on the toilet. Your child will need a stool to rest their feet on.

## What should I do if things don't improve?

Please contact your GP in the first instance and if you've followed the advice in this leaflet and the problem still exists. Your GP may wish to refer your child to a paediatric clinic, if necessary.

## For more information

**Bladder & Bowel UK** - charity offering advice and support

<https://www.bbuk.org.uk/children-young-people>

Helpline 0161 607 8219

The following Bladder & Bowel UK leaflet may also be helpful.

<https://www.bbuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Understanding-childhood-constipation-leaflet-advice-for-parents-and-carers.pdf>

**ERIC** - The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity

<https://www.eric.org.uk/>

Freephone 0808 1699 949

The helpline is open Monday - Thursday, 10am to 2pm



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### **Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS)**

PALS can provide information, advice and support to patients and relatives and will listen to and act on your concerns, suggestions or queries.

**020 8934 3993**

[khft.pals@nhs.net](mailto:khft.pals@nhs.net)

### **Accessible information**

We are actively working to make our patient information easier to read and accessible in a range of formats. If you would like this information in large print, audio or electronic format please speak to a member of staff in the department. If you need a different format, please let us know and we will do our best to meet your request.

### **Pastoral & Spiritual Support Services**

We offer a multi-cultural approach serving people of all faiths and life philosophies. A Duty Chaplain is available 24/7. You can request to speak to a Church of England or Roman Catholic Priest, the Rabbi or Imam.

Please call the hospital switchboard on **020 8546 7711** and ask to speak to the Duty Chaplain.

### **Kingston Hospital NHS Foundation Trust**

Galsworthy Road  
Kingston upon Thames  
Surrey KT2 7QB

**020 8546 7711**

[www.kingstonhospital.nhs.uk](http://www.kingstonhospital.nhs.uk)