

# **Helping Your Child with Constipation and Soiling**

**A guide for parents of school age children**

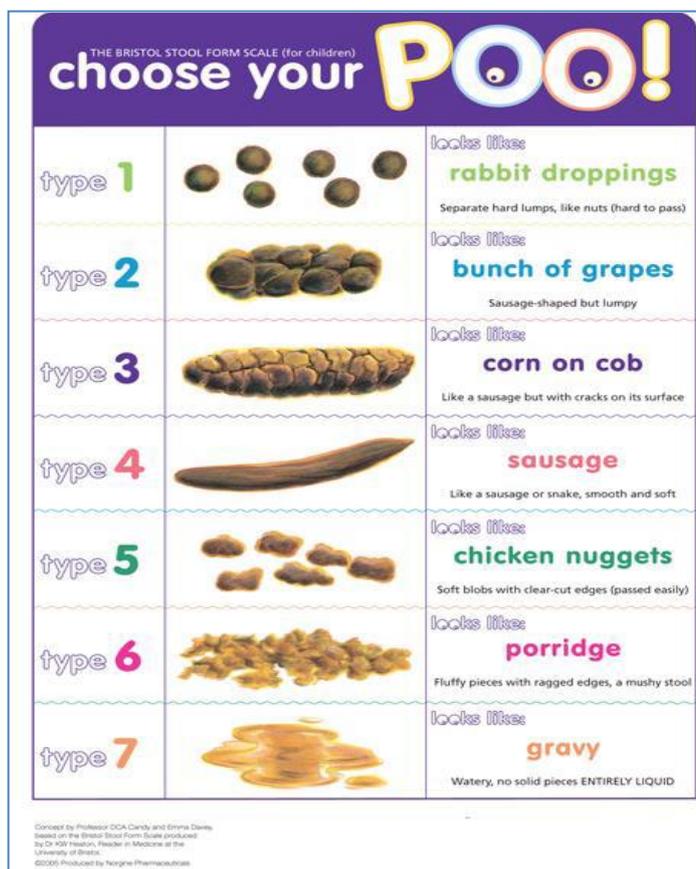
## What is constipation?

The most common bowel problem for children is constipation. It occurs when your child does not open their bowels regularly. The poo becomes hard and dry making it difficult and painful to pass.

**Up to 30% of children up to the age of 19 experience constipation (NICE 2010)**

Some children may be doing a poo every day but not emptying their bowel properly or only passing small amounts - they too can also be suffering from constipation.

Constipation can be difficult to recognise therefore may be missed.



Children have different patterns of when they need to poo.

A child is considered to be constipated if they poo less than 3 times a week, find it difficult to pass their poo and is painful; their poo is often hard and small.

One episode of pain may cause children to avoid going to the toilet to poo – this can lead to a build-up of poo and then becomes even harder or painful to pass.

**Type 1 - has spent the longest time in the bowel. These poos are hard to pass and often requires a lot of straining.**

**Type 7 – has spent the least time in the bowel. Your child will have the need to pass urgently and accidents may happen.**

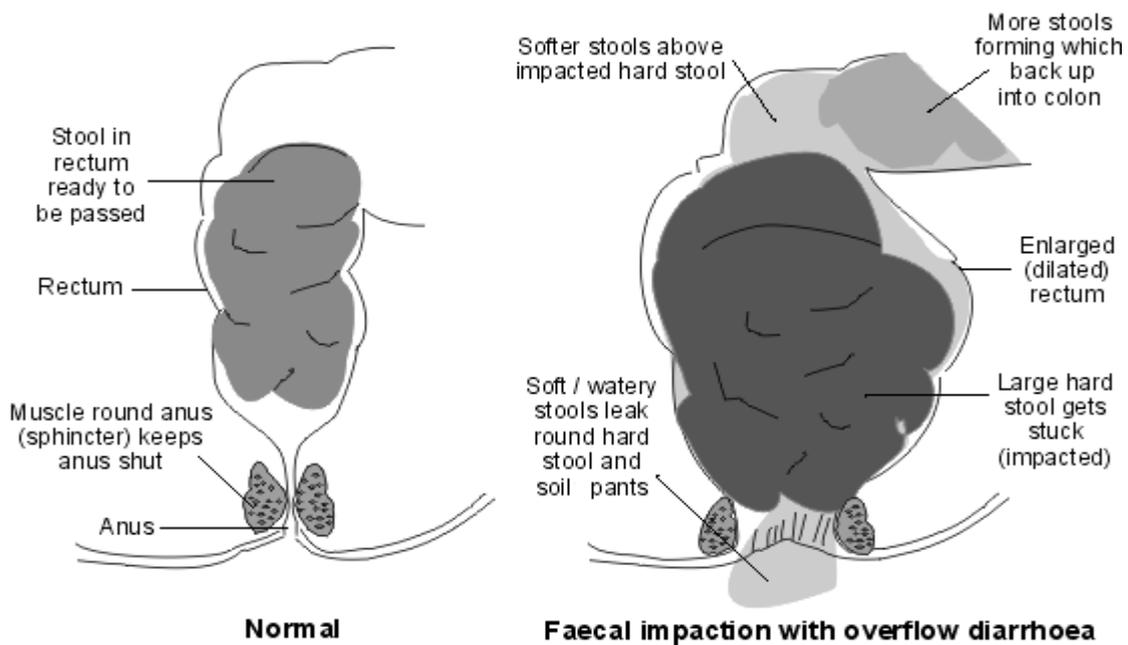
**Ideal poo is Type 4.**

## What is soiling?

Some children may 'mess' their underwear – this is known as soiling. This is caused by a leakage of poo and is often due to being constipated.

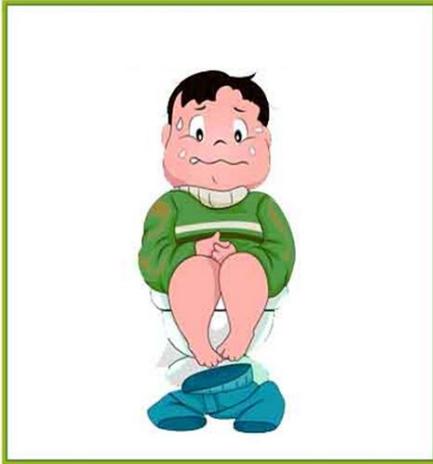
Poo can appear as runny, so you might think your child has diarrhoea, or it might be hard little bits, or both, or a smear in the pants. This is due to liquid poo leaking around the hard lump of poo that is blocking the way (overflow soiling). If constipation has been a longstanding issue the lower bowel and rectum may have become overstretched causing poo to leak out.

### The impacted bowel:



Children who soil are not doing this intentionally. They cannot control when the poo comes out and they may not have any feeling of this happening.

Older children will sometimes deny soiling or will hide their underwear.



## Signs and symptoms of Constipation

The child may experience a combination of symptoms that can alter according to the severity and length of time constipation continues.

- Pooing less than three times per week
- poor appetite
- lack of energy
- irritable / unhappy
- bloated tummy
- nausea and vomiting
- passing the occasional enormous poo
- foul smelling wind and poo
- fear/avoiding the toilet
- withholding the urge to poo a large/hard, uncomfortable /painful to pass
- irregular bowel activity
- presence of blood
- stomach pain
- straining
- sore bottom / itching
- disturbed or poor sleep pattern
- behavioural issues
- poo at night whilst asleep (after one year of age)
- leaking liquid poo (overflow soiling)
- dribbling wee or bedwetting due to pressure from the impacted bowel pressing on the bladder

**Constipation is treatable and the earlier it is recognised the easier it is to treat.**

## Things that can increase the chances of constipation

- Not eating a healthy diet than contains fibre, fruit and vegetables



6 – 8 glasses  
per day

- Not drinking enough water
- Behaviour - holding in poo or avoiding going to the toilet
- Not enough exercise
- A change in routine – e.g., going on holiday, new surroundings
- Poor toileting routine
- Family history of constipation
- Anxiety and emotional upset
- Medical conditions
- Some medication

**Constipation and soiling is not because your child is lazy or pooing intentionally. It is helpful for you and your child to remain positive and calm.**

## What you can do to help....

### Establish a routine

Ensure your child goes to the toilet regularly throughout the day. Encourage your child to go to the toilet for a poo 10 – 20 minutes after eating a main meal. A regular, calm and relaxed toilet routine will encourage the complete emptying of the bowel helping to lessen pooing accidents and avoid constipation.

## Look at your child's their diet

Offer foods that are higher in fibre and aim to include them at each meal and snack time. A good varied diet should include fibre containing cereals, wholemeal bread, fruit and vegetables (these can include the skin).

**Drink more fluids -** Aim to get your child to drink 6-8 glasses of fluid each day - see recommended fluid intake. Suitable drinks include water, squash and fruit juices and no more than a pint of milk a day. By increasing fluid intake helps to keep poo softer and easier to pass.

**A high fibre and fluid diet is a healthy diet and is suitable for all the family.**

## Recommended Daily Fluid Intake

Age	Sex	Total Fluids per Day
4 – 8 years	Female Male	1000 – 1400mls 1000 – 1400mls
9 – 13 years	Female Male	1200 – 2100mls 1400 – 2300mls
14 – 18 years	Female Male	1400 – 2500mls 2100 – 3200mls

Information taken from the Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence (ERIC)

## Exercise

Encourage your child to get active and engage in physical activity. All children and young people should minimise the amount of time spent being sitting (sedentary) for extended periods.

**60 mins per day for children aged over 5 years**

(Dept. of Health, 2011)

## Managing soiling in school

Talk to your child's class teacher to establish whether your child has free access to the toilet and fluids whilst at School. Inform them about your child's condition – often they don't know! Provide a change of clothing, toilet wipes and nappy sacks/sealable bags for use at school.

## Tips for successful pooing on the toilet

- Don't let your child wait to do a poo. Talk about poo – read books on poo. Make it the normal part of everyday life that it is.
- Give your child enough time so they don't feel rushed (5 – 10 minutes).
- Set aside a time each day for your child to sit on the toilet. A good time for this is 20 – 30 minutes after a meal, when their bowels are most active.
- Ensure your child sits on the toilet properly (see diagram). This makes it easier to push poo out. To help your child feel supported they may need to put their feet on a footstool in front of the toilet.
- Make the toilet fun by keeping activities for when sitting on the toilet, for example, a favourite book.
- To help with pushing encourage your child to blow bubbles or blow a balloon.
- Teach them to massage their tummy.
- Gentle rocking backwards and forwards whilst sitting on the toilet can also help; this can be done to music.
- If your child says that it hurts to poo, tell them to stop trying, and try again later



### The correct way to sit on the toilet to poo

- Sit comfortably and relaxed on the toilet seat – perhaps using a child's size toilet seat/insert seat.
- Feet firmly on the floor or resting on a step.
- Raise the knees higher than the hips.
- Lean slightly forwards and rest elbows on knees.

## Moving from a nappy to the toilet

It is common for younger children to prefer to continue to use their nappy for security and familiarity that a nappy has given them since being a baby. Holding onto poo can cause constipation. It is better for your child to poo in a nappy than not at all but you can encourage them to start using the toilet. Remember, consistency and patience is important. Encourage your child to ask for a nappy when they need to poo.

- ✓ Encourage nappy changing in the toilet area
- ✓ Encourage/teach your child to wipe their bottom at this stage and to empty the formed poo into the toilet, flush away and wash their hands.
- ✓ Progress to sitting your child on the toilet still in their nappy with the lid down with their feet on a step. After a while, get them to sit on the toilet with the lid up - using a training seat/insert seat to help them to feel more secure. From here the nappy can be loosened gradually until it can be removed altogether.
- ✓ Toilet paper can be put in the toilet before a poo to help reduce noise/splash.
- ✓ Stickers can be used as a reward for stages of progress.

**Try not to imply that poo is dirty or wrong, this can lead to withholding behaviour and constipation. Always be pleased that poo has come out – and if it has come out in the wrong place be clear that it not the poo you mind but where it is.**

## When to seek help

Constipation can start at any age and most children get constipated from time to time. However, if your child has constipation that doesn't go away, he or she may need treatment to get back to normal. Please see your child's GP who will offer you help.

## Treatment

**More than 1/3 of children with constipation develop chronic constipation and this can take some time to resolve.**

If your child is constipated your child's GP may prescribe medication. You may have to continue to give this medication (maintenance dose) to ensure your child continues to pass regularly a soft painless poo. It is important to continue giving your child their prescribed medication until it is completed even if it

the constipation appears to be improving. Your child's GP may also refer you and your child to your local Healthy Together Team for further support and management.

## Further Information and Support

[www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk)

[www.bladderandboweluk.co.uk](http://www.bladderandboweluk.co.uk)

[www.healthforunder5's.co.uk](http://www.healthforunder5's.co.uk)

[www.healthforkids.co.uk](http://www.healthforkids.co.uk)

[www.healthforteens.co.uk](http://www.healthforteens.co.uk)



**Text ChatHealth: 07520 615381 (city)  
07520 615382 (county)**

**Your local Healthy Together Team**

**Your child's GP**

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<b>Date Reviewed:</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> May 2018