

what you NEED TO KNOW about...

Caring for children over 1 year of age with constipation

What is constipation?

You've just learned your child or teen has a very common problem: constipation. Parents sometimes feel a little embarrassed about this, but constipation happens to most children at some point. The good news is that constipation is rarely caused by a serious illness.

Constipation:

- Means that stool is building up in the bowel and causing distress.
- Can still happen even if a child is having a bowel movement (BM, stool or poop!) every day.








Bristol Stool Chart

A child or teen with constipation may:

- Suffer with stomach pain or cramps (these can be severe)
- Have very large stool (sometimes needing a plunger to get it down the toilet)
- Have stool that is Type 1, 2 or 3 on the stool chart
- Have trouble passing urine (going pee)
- Need to pass urine often
- Have blood on stools
- Have problems with behaviour
- Leak stool into underwear
- Avoid going to the toilet

Type 4 is the ideal stool consistency.



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 the surface
Type 4		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

Bristol Stool Chart developed by Dr. Ken Heaton
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How does constipation happen?

Constipation is often caused by:

- Not eating enough fibre, fruits, vegetables and grains
 - Not getting enough physical activity
 - Travel
 - Change in diet
 - Some medications (antacids, opiate pain medications, anti-depressants)
 - Stress
 - Holding in stool ('withholding')
 - Putting off going to the toilet when feeling the urge to 'poop'.
- Children may do this when they are feeling stressed about potty training, are too busy playing, embarrassed about using a school or public toilet or afraid of having a painful or unpleasant bowel movement.

Delaying a bowel movement causes stool to become hard, dry, and difficult to pass. This sometimes causes a large mass of stool in the rectum (the part of the bowel that holds stool). When this happens, it is called fecal impaction. Stool builds up behind the impaction and may leak, soiling a child's underwear. This is often mistaken for diarrhea.

How is constipation treated?

By the time you notice symptoms, constipation has usually been a problem for a while, and it may take months to get better. Having a large amount of stool in the bowels causes them to become larger than normal, and this makes it harder for the bowel muscles to empty stool. The bowel will get back to a more normal size if stool doesn't build up over the next 3-6 months. Children and teens usually need non-prescription medications for a few months, along with some other steps to resolve constipation. Children and youth can take medications by mouth or through the rectum (bum). We usually suggest medications by mouth. These medications are available in drugstores, but you will have to ask the pharmacist for them.

1 Initial bowel clean-out

The first step is to clean out the bowel. Your doctor will check which treatment you should use.

- **1 day Pico-Salax® or Purg-Odan® clean out**, for children over 1 year of age. Ask your pharmacist for these, they are 'behind the counter'. They mix into a flavoured fluid, and children and youth usually take them without any trouble. These are for the 'clean-out' only-don't use for ongoing constipation. Follow instructions in the package carefully.
- **3 day PEG 3350 clean out (Lax-a-Day® or Restoralax®)**, for children over 1 year of age. The doses we've listed below are larger than those a child would take every day. But the amounts below are safe and effective for the initial bowel clean out. The amount you give depends on your child or teen's weight.

If your child weighs:

- 7-10 kg: give **2 teaspoons=10 mL** mixed in at least 100 mL fluid twice each day for 3 days
- 11-13 kg: give **3 teaspoons=15 mL** mixed in at least 150 mL fluid twice each day 3 days
- 14-17 kg: give **4 teaspoons=20 mL** mixed in at least 200 mL fluid twice each day for 3 days
- 18-25 kg: give **5 teaspoons=25mL** mixed in at least 250 mL fluid twice each day for 3 days
- 26-50 kg: give **7 teaspoons=35mL** mixed in at least 350mL fluid twice each day for 3 days
- Over 50 kg: give **15 teaspoons=75mL** mixed in at least 750mL fluid twice each day for 3 days



After this step, move on to step 2. This is very important, even if your child has been constipated for only a few days.

2 Retrain the bowels and prevent constipation

- **PEG 3350 (Lax-a-day® or Restoralax®)**: Your child or teen may need to continue with these treatments once a day for 3 months or so to get back to a normal pattern of bowel movements. The amount you give depends on your child or teen's weight. If your child weighs:

- 7-10 kg: give **2 teaspoons=10 mL** once a day mixed in at least 100 mL fluid
- 11-13 kg: give **3 teaspoons=15 mL** once a day mixed in at least 150 mL fluid
- 14-17 kg: give **4 teaspoons=20 mL** once a day mixed in at least 200 mL fluid
- More than 17 kg: give **5 teaspoons=25 mL** once a day mixed in at least 250 mL fluid

- Check your child's stools (use the Bristol stool chart). Decrease the dose of Lax-a-day® or Restoralax® if the stools are very loose or your child or teen gets cramps
- You can continue this medication for longer than 3 months if the constipation doesn't get better.

- **Healthy diet** with plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. See Canada's food guide for the number of servings of fruit, vegetables and grains your child should have each day.
- **Regular physical activity** helps stimulate normal bowel function and keeps the bowel healthy. Children need at least one hour of moderate physical activity each day.
- **Bathroom routine**. It can take weeks or months to train the bowel back to a normal pattern. Take advantage of the body's normal urge to empty after meals. 20-30 minutes after each meal at home, have your child sit on the toilet or potty for 1 minute for each year of age (for example, 3 minutes for a 3 year old). Give your child a foot stool if needed. This will make your child more comfortable and give some support to let go of a bowel movement. Join your child to read a book together or chat and catch up! Younger children may like stickers on a chart for sitting on the toilet after each meal.



When to Contact Your Health Care Provider:

Constipation that goes on for a long time may lead to other problems or signal an underlying condition. Contact your Health Care Provider if your child or teen:

- Has severe pain or pain lasting more than 30 minutes
- Gets a fever
- Has vomiting
- Passes blood or mucous with soft stools
- Has abdominal swelling
- Loses weight
- Wakes up from sleep to pass stool
- Keeps crying and you can't do anything that soothes your child
- Develops painful cracks in the skin around the anus (anal fissures)
- Has intestine drooping out of the anus (rectal prolapse)
- Is still constipated (stool type 1, 2 or 3 on the stool chart)

after following the treatment plan (above) for 2 weeks

Numbers to know

Telehealth Ontario 1-866-797-0000 Health Information from Registered Nurses, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week TTY: 1-866-797-0007

Ottawa Public Health Info Line 613-580-6744

Québec Info santé 811

Eat Right Ontario, www.eatrightontario.ca

