



A guide to...

Constipation

Patient Information

Children's Emergency Department (CED)

Watford General Hospital



Caring for your child with constipation

Your child has been diagnosed with constipation

We are happy that your child is well enough to be taken home under your supervision.

What is it?

Constipation is a common condition that affects people of all ages. It can mean that poo is not passed regularly, or that the bowel is not able to completely empty.

The severity of constipation varies from person to person. Many people only experience constipation for a short time, but for others, it can be a long term (chronic) condition that causes significant pain and discomfort, and affects their quality of life.

What causes constipation?

Your child may be constipated because they:

- aren't eating enough fibrous food like fruit and veg
- aren't drinking enough
- are having problems with potty (or toilet) training
- are worried about something, such as moving house, starting nursery or the arrival of a new baby.

What are the symptoms?

Your child may be constipated if:

- they don't poo at least three times a week
- their poo is often large, hard and difficult to push out
- their poo looks like "rabbit droppings" or little pellets
- they are having staining in their underwear — this is called **overflow soiling**

Constipation can cause painful poos. This can create a vicious cycle as the more it hurts, the more they hold it and so on. This is called **stool withholding** and is a common cause of constipation.

Investigation and Treatment

There are no specific tests for constipation. The diagnosis is made from both the history and physical examination as the poo can often be felt throughout the abdomen.

The longer your child is constipated, the more difficult it can be for them to get back to 'normal' habits.

Laxatives are often recommended for children who are eating solid food, alongside diet and lifestyle changes. The type of laxative will depend upon their symptoms and examination. Your clinician will explain the treatment required for your child today.

It may take several months for the treatments to work, but keep trying until they do. Remember that laxative treatment may make your child's overflow soiling worse before it gets better.

Once your child's constipation has been dealt with, it is important to stop it coming back. Your GP may advise that your child keeps taking laxatives for a while to make sure their poo stays soft enough to push out regularly.

How to prevent constipation

- **Make sure your child drinks plenty**—offer breastfed babies who aren't eating solids yet plenty of breastfeeds. Formula fed babies can have extra water between their feeds.
- **Give your child a variety of foods**—include plenty of fruit and vegetables, which are a good source of fibre.
- **Encourage your child to be physically active.**
- **Get your child into a routine** of regularly sitting on the potty or toilet—after meals or before bed, and praise them whether or not they poo. 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 toilet or potty.
- **Ask if they feel worried** about using the toilet or potty—some children don't want to poo in certain situations eg, nursery
- **Stay calm and reassuring.**

Please ensure that you make a follow up appointment with your GP.

The Bristol Stool Chart is useful in describing poo type — aim for Type 4



www.eric.org.uk is a very useful resource.

If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 187** or email **westherts.pals@nhs.uk**



Author	Sian Edwards
Department	Children's Emergency Department
Ratified / Review Date	January 2025 / January 2028
ID Number	40/2360/V1

