

# Treating childhood constipation and soiling with a laxative regime (disimpaction)

Children's Hospital

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: November 2025

Next review: November 2028

Leaflet number: 1269 Version: 2

## What is constipation and soiling?

Your child has been diagnosed by the doctor/nurse as having idiopathic constipation and/or soiling. Idiopathic constipation is a medical diagnosis given when we have ruled out disease or anatomical reasons for the constipation.

Constipation is when there is poo built up in the bottom. It becomes stuck and hard to pass. Soiling happens when poo is stuck in the bottom and liquid poo works its way around the solid poo. It leaks out of the bottom into the underwear. Your child can also soil themselves if they have lost feeling in their bowel. The bowel is the lower part of the digestion system. Your child may not feel the need to poo so it leaks out throughout the day and night.

## Causes of constipation in children

Constipation in children can happen because of many reasons. Sometimes there is no obvious reason. Sometimes it can be because your child is:

- not eating enough high fibre foods like fruit and vegetables
- not drinking enough fluids
- feeling pressured or interrupted while potty/toilet training
- feeling worried or anxious about something like moving house, arrival of new baby, starting nursery/school, life events (separation/divorce, death of family member)

Children can get constipated and then find it painful to poo. This may mean they do not want to try to poo. This can then create a circle of: the more they hold it in, the more constipated they get.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.uhleicester.nhs.uk](http://www.uhleicester.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net)

## How is this treated?

To treat this, your child needs to follow a treatment which clears the build up of poo. This is called a disimpaction treatment programme. We will give your child medicines that will help move the poo along (laxatives). It will help clear out all the poo that is stuck. It is important to follow the doctor or nurses advice. If your child does not have the full disimpaction treatment, their symptoms of constipation and soiling may go on for longer.

It can take many days, sometimes 1 or 2 weeks to clear out all the poo. Your child may pass a lot of poo all at once or many small poos over some time.

If your child has been soiling (leaking poo into their pants), this may get worse in the beginning. This is normal. It is important not to stop or slow down the treatment as it will mean your child does not get all of their poo cleared. The only way to be sure that your child's bowel has been cleared is to continue until your child is passing really watery poo. This will look like brown water with small bits in it.

## What medicine is used?

We will give your child 1 of these: movicol, cosmocol or laxido. They are all the same laxative medicine. They are just sold using different names. This type of laxative is taken by mouth and is absorbed straight into the bowel. Other medicines are absorbed into the bloodstream.

The medicine in the bowel will soften and break large poos into smaller poos. This will help the poo to move through the bowel.

Your child may need to spend some time at home away from nursery or school whilst taking this medicine. Your child may have more tummy ache as the poo moves along the bowel. Let your child know that this is normal and a good sign. Baths, warm water bottles and paracetamol will all help with this discomfort.

## Disimpaction doses

	Child 1 to 5 years old	Child 5 to 12 years old	Children aged 12 and over: should be treated with the adult preparation
<b>Day 1</b>	2 sachets	4 sachets	4 sachets
<b>Day 2</b>	4 sachets	6 sachets	6 sachets
<b>Day 3</b>	4 sachets	8 sachets	8 sachets
<b>Day 4</b>	6 sachets	10 sachets	8 sachets
<b>Day 5</b>	6 sachets	12 sachets	8 sachets
<b>Day 6</b>	8 sachets	12 sachets	8 sachets
<b>Day 7</b>	8 sachets	12 sachets	8 sachets

The doses can be taken over a few hours or over the whole day.

## How much water do I mix the sachets with?

You must mix each sachet with 65ml water. This water can be flavoured with squash. You can mix 2 sachets together as long as you mix it with 2 times the amount of water (130ml).

If your child is 12 years old or over and have been given the adult sachets, each sachet must be mixed with 125ml water/squash.

## When should I stop giving my child the medicine?

When your child is passing watery poo. You can stop before 7 days if they are passing the watery, bitty poo.

Your child will need to continue to take their medication but in smaller amounts. Laxative treatment needs to continue to prevent the constipation from coming back and to let the stretched bowel to regain its tone. This is called the maintenance dose.

### Maintenance dose:

<b>Child 1 to 5 years:</b>	½ (half a sachet) to 3 sachets daily
<b>Child 5 to 12 years:</b>	1 to 4 sachets daily
<b>12 years and older:</b>	1 to 2 sachets daily

You can adjust the dose so your child poos at least 1 soft poo every day. You will need to monitor their poos and give more or less laxative doses so that this happens.

Your child may need to stay on laxatives for many months or even years. You will know if they need less laxatives, just check their poo and decrease the dose if it is too soft/ sloppy. Long term use of laxatives will not hurt your child. Poorly treated constipation will.

## When to change the maintenance dose:

We describe poo using the Bristol Stool Chart (see next page). This is a useful way to help you decide if your child needs more or less medication or the same amount.

- **Types 1 to 2:** shows constipation.
- **Types 3 to 5:** shows normal stool.
- **Types 6 to 7:** shows diarrhoea.

You are trying to get your child's poo to a type 3 to 4, they should be having the sachets 1 to 3 times daily.

- If your child's poo is type 1 to 2, then their medicine needs increasing.
- If your child's poo is type 5 to 7, then their medicine needs decreasing.

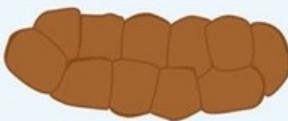
# POO CHECKER

## 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.*

## More information about bowel management

- **ERIC:** The children's bowel and bladder charity. Resources of advice, diet, fluids, toileting, school issues (leaflets for parents to print) [www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk)
- **Bowel and bladder UK:** supporting people with bladder and bowel problems. Resources regarding constipation, medications, understanding children's bowel problems, toilet training (leaflets for parents to print) [www.bbuk.org.uk](http://www.bbuk.org.uk)
- **NICE:** national guidance on constipation in children [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg99](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg99)

### Books:

- **It hurts when I poop!** A story for children who are scared to use the potty by Howard Bennett.
- **Ready Set Potty** by Brenda Batts.
- **Toilet training and the autism spectrum (ASD)** by Eva Fleming and Lorraine MacAllister. Aimed at professionals but also useful for parents.
- **Stool withholding: what to do when your child won't poo!** by Sophia J Ferguson. Helpful to give understanding to parents about stool withholding and the importance of keeping stools very soft.

### YouTube:

- **Poo goes to poo land.** Teaching a child what happens to poo when it is flushed down the toilet.
- **The poo in you.** It shows how poo is made in the digestive system and how it can build up and cause stretching of the bowel.
- **The unicorn changed the way I poop.** It describes how sitting on the toilet in a certain way will help with better pooing.

### Equipment: Squatty Potty

Squatty Potty is a stool to help with positioning on the toilet. It is designed differently to normal toddler steps and helps your child sit at the best angle with knees higher than hips. Available from internet stores; choose 9 inch height.

