

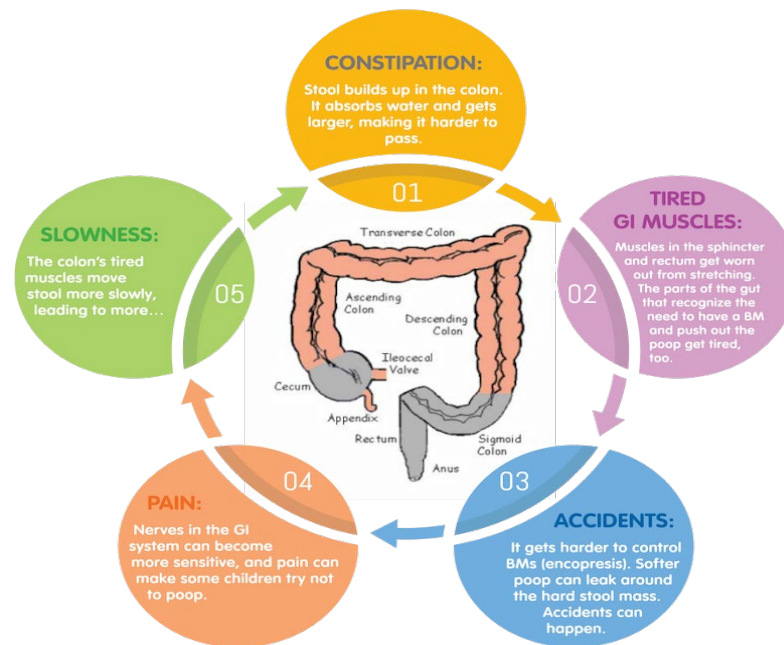
Encopresis

A resource for parents

What is Encopresis?

Encopresis is the repeated passing of stool into clothing. This typically occurs when a child is impacted, or “backed up,” and the colon becomes too full, resulting in liquid stool leaking around the hardened stool. Eventually, withholding stool can cause stretching (distention) of the bowels and fecal incontinence.

Encopresis typically occurs after age 4, once a child has already been toilet trained. Soiling is most connected to long-standing constipation and, although less frequently, can result from emotional distress, such as changes at home or school.



Signs and symptoms of encopresis may include:

- Leakage of stool or liquid stool on underwear, which can be mistaken for diarrhea
- Constipation with dry, hard stool
- Passage of large stool that clogs or almost clogs the toilet
- Avoidance of bowel movements
- Long periods of time between bowel movements
- Lack of appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Problems with daytime wetting or bedwetting (enuresis)
- Repeated bladder infections, typically in girls

How to Help Your Child:

Encourage a Healthy GI System:

- Stay hydrated – about 6-8 glasses of water per day
- Get moving and exercise
- Develop a toilet routine to promote regular bowel movements
- Increase fiber! and this is how...

Foods	Moderate fiber	High fiber
Bread	Whole-wheat bread, granola bread, wheat bran muffins, whole-grain waffles, popcorn	
Cereal	Bran cereals, shredded wheat, oatmeal, granola, oat bran	100% bran cereal
Vegetables	Beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, corn, green beans, green peas, acorn and butternut squash, spinach, potato with skin, avocado	
Fruits	Apples with peel, dates, papayas, mangoes, nectarines, oranges, pears, kiwis, strawberries, applesauce, raspberries, blackberries, raisins	Cooked prunes, dried figs
Meat substitutes	Peanut butter, nuts	Baked beans, black-eyed peas, garbanzo beans, lima beans, pinto beans, kidney beans, chili with beans, trail mix

Establish a Sitting Routine:

- Chose a time and stay consistent. The goal is to eventually be able to sit for 3-7 minutes about 30 minutes following each meal.
- Start with brief sits and increase the length over time.
- Tell your child it's time to sit or offer a small option in timing. ("Would you like to sit now or in 1 minute?")
- Stay positive and praise often.
- Offer a small reward for finishing a sit (there doesn't need to be a BM for a prize).



- Use distractions (books/toys). Have your child blow bubbles or balloons, as it will help relax the muscles needed to have a BM. Be careful with electronics because it may distract them too much!
- Wait out resistance and don't engage in tantrums to avoid reinforcing the behavior.
- Hang in there, you're doing great! Remember, adjusting to a new routine takes time and disruptive behavior often gets worse before you see improvement. Stay patient and consistent.

Provide Emotional Support

Children often feel upset or embarrassed when they have accidents. This can have a significant impact on their self-esteem and interactions, specifically peers. This may also increase worry, resulting in avoidance of school, play dates and sleep overs.

As a parent, you may also notice feelings arise within yourself, such as guilt, shame and anger. Do not blame or punish your child for having accidents; it is important to provide unconditional love and support to your child. Your child may look to you for comfort and mirror your reactions.



Speak with a Medical Provider

Contact your child's healthcare provider if your child:

- Is constipated for more than 2 weeks
- Can't do normal activities because of constipation
- Can't get a stool out with normal pushing
- Has liquid or soft stool leaking out of anus
- Has small, painful tears in the skin around the anus (anal fissures)
- Had red, swollen veins (hemorrhoids) in the rectum
- Has belly pain, fever or vomiting
- Has changes in urination, weakness in the legs, or back pain

Recommended Reading

For Children:

- "Dash's Belly Ache: A book for children who can't or won't poop" by Wendy Hayden (2019)
- "I Can't, I Won't, No Way!: A Book For Children Who Refuse to Poop" by Tracey J. Vessillo, Mike Motz
- "It Hurts When I Poop! a Story for Children Who Are Scared to Use the Potty" by Howard J Bennett M.D., M S Weber (2007)
- "Poop Poop Dee Doop: Helping children with encopresis (Pediatric Mental Health Resources for Children)" by Cynthia Veatch LICSW, Cheri Johnson (2018)

For Parents:

- “Encopresis— you can beat it!: Game-changing solutions for Toilet Anxiety, Soiling, and Constipation in Children” by Dr. Baruch Kushnir (2019)
- “The Constipation Game Plan: A Step-By-Step Guide to Managing Your Child’s Chronic Constipation” by Christine Stephenson, PT, DPT (2022)
- “The Ins and Outs of Poop: A Guide to Treating Childhood Constipation” by Thomas R. DuHamel, PHD (2012)

References

- Adapted from: Children’s Mercy Hospital (2023)
- Adapted from: Mayo Clinic (2023)
- Adapted from: Stanford Medicine Children’s Health (2023)