

Let's Talk About...

Constipation and Home Bowel Program

What is constipation?

Constipation happens when:

- A child does not poop often enough (at least once a day)
- Poop (stool) is hard, painful, or difficult to push out
- The body isn't getting all the poop inside to come out

Constipation can get worse over months and years. It can cause stomach aches and big hard stools that clog the toilet. Some children who have been constipated for a long time begin to have accidents, soiling, and poop stains in the underwear. These are signs of months or years of constipation.

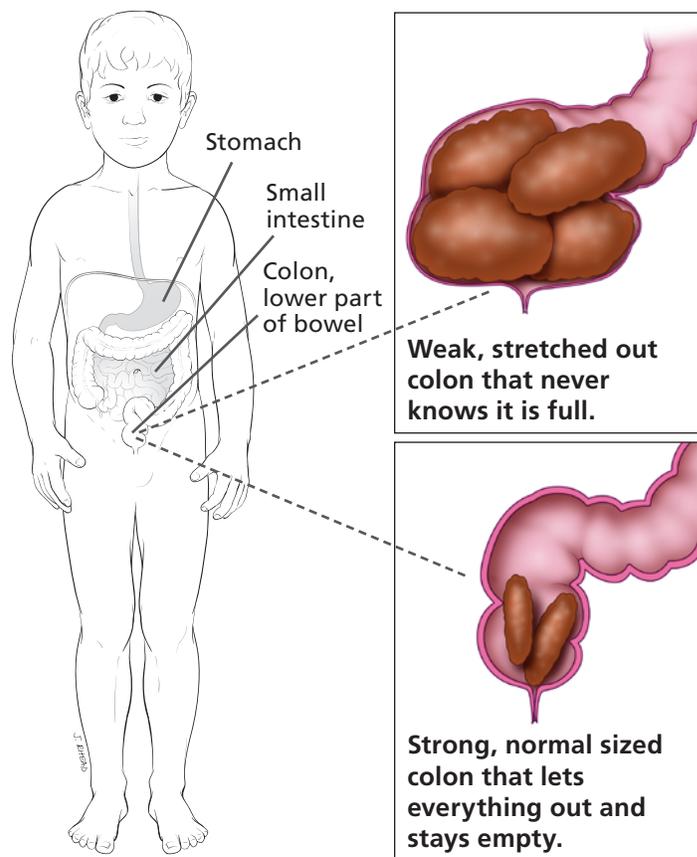
What causes constipation?

Most constipation in children is caused by a child holding poop in too long, over and over, often for months or years. Children often hold it in without their parents knowing it. Many things can cause a child to hold poop in. Painful experience in the bathroom can create fear and make a child never want to let poop out again. Stress about life changes, toilet training, and school can also make a difference.

The colon moves waste or poop from the body. **Each time a child holds poop in too long, the colon gets more and more stretched out and weak.** Think of it like a balloon that has been blown up over and over again.

Once the colon gets stretched out, it becomes more difficult for a child to feel a normal urge to use the toilet. Without reminders the child can walk around full of stool without knowing it. At this point a child does not even know they are holding in their poop.

Once the colon gets stretched out, **it also becomes more difficult for the colon to push all the poop out.** A stretched-out colon is almost never empty. It is always full of poop, and the child is always uncomfortable.



Other things can make constipation get even worse:

- Eating too much junk food and fast food. These foods are high in fat and sugar and low in fiber.
- Not drinking enough water
- Not getting enough exercise

How is constipation treated?

- 1 Bowel cleanout.** Your child needs to drink a large amount of liquid mixed with medicine. This will flush all the poop out of the colon. **No treatment plan will work until this step is done.**
- 2 An ongoing daily bowel program for months or years.** Your child needs to take medicines to keep the poop soft. Then your child needs to sit on the toilet at regular times each day. Doing this daily retrains the brain to sense that it is time to poop.

Bowel Cleanout

Check dosing with your child's healthcare provider.

Time of day	Age 2–4 years (22 to 44 pounds)	Age 5–10 years (45 to 88 pounds)	Older than 10 years (over 88 pounds)
Morning	Take 1 chocolate laxative square	Take 1 + ½ chocolate laxative squares	Take 2 chocolate laxative squares
Throughout the day	Mix 4 capfuls of PEG3350 powder in 20 ounces of fluid Drink it all over 8 hours	Mix 7 capfuls of PEG3350 powder in 32 ounces of fluid Drink it all over 8 hours	Mix 14 capfuls of PEG3350 powder in 64 ounces of fluid Drink it all over 8 hours
Evening	Take 1 more chocolate laxative square	Take 1 + ½ more chocolate laxative squares	Take 2 more chocolate laxative squares

1. Bowel cleanout

The goal of bowel cleanout is to wash all the poop out of the colon. The stool will come out brown or dark, and will slowly become more see-through until it is gone. Keep going until the liquid coming out of your child's bottom is mostly clear, like urine (pee) or tea. **This may take multiple days.**

To do a bowel cleanout at home you will need:

- A stool-softener medicine called PEG 3350 (Polyethylene glycol 3350). It is sold as Miralax®, ClearLAX®, and several similar names.
- Chocolate laxative squares, called sennosides. This is sold as Ex-Lax® Chocolate Stimulant Laxative.
- Plenty of fluids. Sports drinks work best. Examples include Gatorade® and Powerade®.
- At least 3 days to spend with your child at home near a bathroom. Your child will not be able to attend school.

Food allowed while on bowel cleanout

Only clear foods that you can see through. Examples include gelatin snacks (JELL-O® or similar), Popsicles®, sports drinks, and plain broth (vegetable, beef, or chicken). Solid foods like pizza or sandwiches only create more poop and make this take longer.

How long do we need to do the bowel cleanout?

It is common to need to do the bowel cleanout **for a few days in a row**. Every child is different.

If you finish day 1 and the poop is not yet clear, repeat everything again for day 2 or day 3.

If your child's poop is still not clear after day 3, call your child's healthcare provider.

2. Daily bowel program

Every day for at least 6 months your child needs to:

- Take medicines to keep the poop soft
- Sit on the toilet at regular times each day

This process retrains the child's brain to sense that it is time to poop. It reminds children when the colon is full so they can let poop out. This will prevent a child from getting a stretched out colon again.

Medicines to keep poop soft

Your child should take between ½ capful and 2 capfuls of PEG3350 powder per day. This should cause 1 or 2 soft poops a day.

- Start with 1 capful of PEG3350 powder mixed in 4 to 8 ounces of liquid one time a day.
- If your child is pooping more than 3 times per day, cut down to ½ a capful per day.
- If your child is still not pooping daily, or the poop is not soft, go up to 2 capfuls.
- Talk to your child's doctor if you feel you need to give more than 2 capfuls of PEG 3350 each day. It likely means the bowels aren't clean. Another cleanout may need to be done. The last cleanout may not have been done long enough.

Regular toilet time

Have your child sit on the toilet for 2 to 3 minutes after each meal. Our bodies naturally try to move contents out to make room for what we just ate. Sitting on the toilet at this time will make use of that opportunity.

Do not pressure your child to push during this time — just have them sit. This is especially important for children who are afraid of the toilet. Getting in the habit of sitting with no pressure to make anything happen will help them feel like the toilet is a safe place.

Over a couple of weeks a child will grow more comfortable with sitting regularly. The key is to keep doing it and build it into a habit.



Toilet positioning

Place a stool or solid box at the base of the toilet so that your child's feet don't dangle or hang off the toilet. With the feet resting on the stool, the knees should be above the hips. This puts the body in the best position to let everything out.

Tips:

- Put a chart on the wall next to the toilet. Let your child put a sticker on the chart as a reward each time they sit. Do something special with your child when the chart is filled each week.

How long do we need to do the daily bowel program?

The keys to success with a bowel program are to do it every day for many months. It probably took months or years for the problem to get this bad, and it will take months or years for it to get better. There is no quick fix.

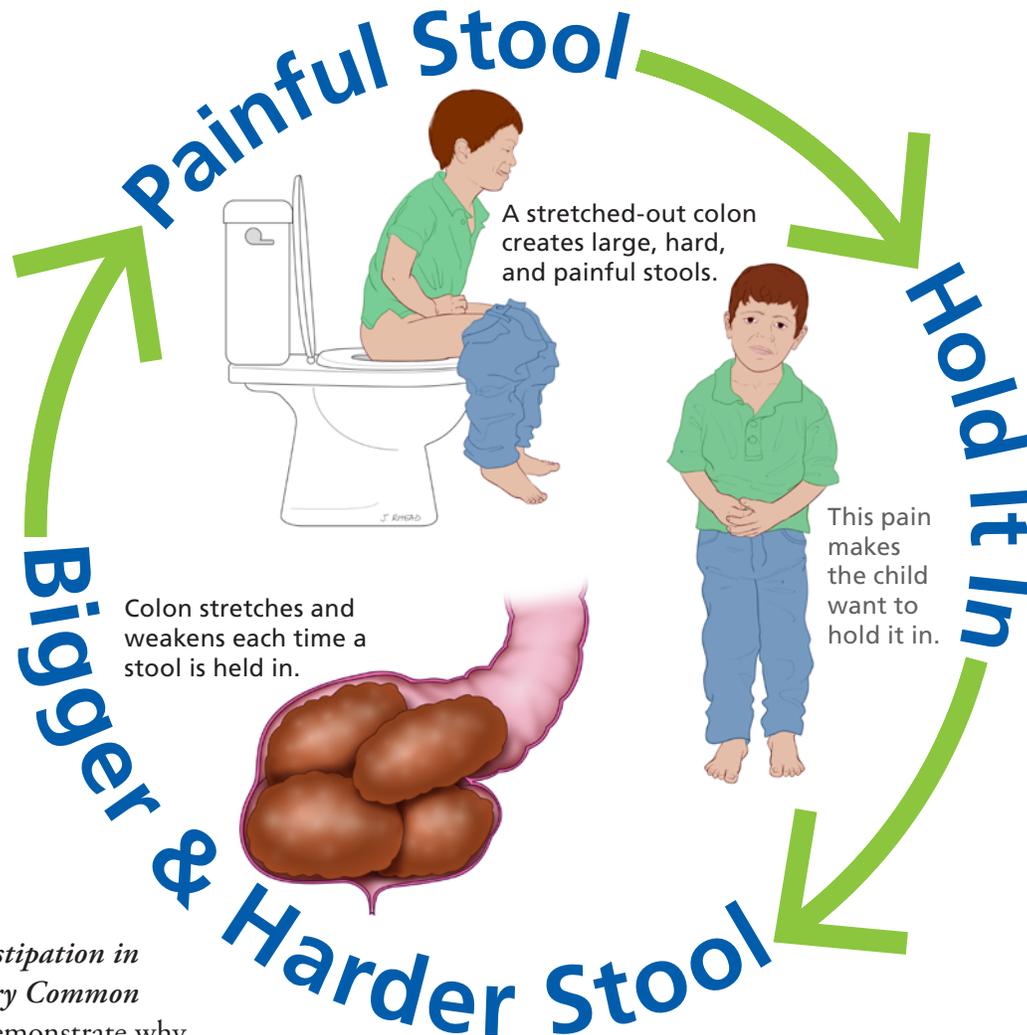
When should we call my child's doctor or healthcare provider?

Call if your child:

- Is vomiting over and over
- Has a swollen, bloated belly that is painful to touch
- Can no longer poop and is no longer passing gas (farting), despite taking the poop-softener medicines
- After 3 days of cleanout medicines, your child's poop is not clear (changed from brown to mostly see through, like urine or tea)
- Dizziness, or fainting
- Has a fever over 100.4°F (38.0°C)

Cycle of Constipation

When this cycle happens over and over, the colon becomes stretched and weak. Children need a long-term treatment plan to break this cycle and repair the colon. This takes months or years.



Video

Our video *Constipation in Children, a Very Common Problem* will demonstrate why constipation happens to children and what you can do to fix it.

To watch the video, do the following:

Go directly to YouTube and search Primary Children's Hospital Constipation.

Or **download** a free Quick Response (QR) code reader from iTunes or Google Play to your mobile device.

Scan the code to watch and learn more.



Click to watch the video and learn more.



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