



Toilet Training

Choosing the right time to start toilet training is not always easy, especially if your child has had bowel surgery.

Between the ages of two and three is a good time to start.

- ▶ Your child is emotionally ready (if the toddler is going through an aggressive or resistant phase - 'terrible two's'! it is probably best to wait until this has passed).
- ▶ Your child can understand simple instructions.
- ▶ Your child is able to sit on and get off the potty or toilet with only a little help.
- ▶ Your family has a 'clear run' with no major upheavals for their child or family, i.e. moving house, going on holiday or expecting a new addition to your family.

Always praise and encourage small steps towards toilet training, i.e. sitting on the toilet for up to 3–5 minutes after meals (even if no results!). Talking about the benefits of growing up, and not wearing nappies. Try not to show frustration (even though it is natural to feel this way!) as it is well known that criticism will only make matters worse.

1. Make sure your child knows the importance of opening their bowels - talk to your child about why they need to do a poo and what happens if they don't go.
2. Make sure your child drinks plenty - encourage your child to drink about six to seven cups of water based juice daily.
3. A healthy diet – any food which leaves behind fibre when it passes through the bowel will help to keep the poo soft, i.e. Weetabix, wholemeal bread, fruit and vegetables. All high fibre foods need to be taken with plenty of fluids to have an effect. Some foods slow down the bowels and can contribute to constipation. Too much milk and other dairy products can do this.
4. For a few children a high fibre diet has the opposite effect - it produces loose and runny poo which is hard to control. This will be apparent at an earlier stage, while your child is in nappies, so you will know that increasing the fibre level is unlikely to be helpful.

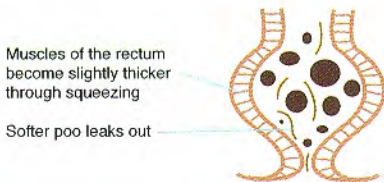
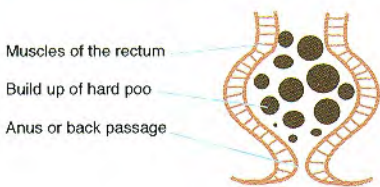
5. Make sure your child is comfortable sitting on the toilet and their feet are firmly on a flat surface. Your child's toilet seat, foot stool or stable potty might help.
6. Encourage your child to go to the toilet at set times - establish a routine of going to the toilet after meals. A meal or drink can often stimulate the muscles in the bowel to contract. Encourage your child to 'push' whilst sitting on the toilet, i.e. grunt like a dinosaur, blow balloons or bubbles, place hands on both hips and cough deeply several times, or rock gently back and forth. This will help strengthen the 'tummy' muscles and help your child to pass a poo.
7. Regular exercise helps to promote healthy bowel activity, especially swimming.
8. Massaging the tummy in a clockwise direction while sitting on the toilet will also help to stimulate the bowel.
9. Make sure your child is not constipated - if your child has not had a bowel movement for a couple of days, the poo may become so hard and large that it hurts to pass. Some children will remain constipated on and off for weeks, becoming irritable and 'off' their food. Parents may also notice an increase in the number of 'accidents' your child has. This is not diarrhoea (although it is easy to think so), it is the leaking of soft fluid poo around the build up of the hard poo. This is called 'overflow diarrhoea'. Your child will not be able to control the 'overflow diarrhoea'. Seek medical advice as your child will need medication to help clear out the hard stool.

Remember, patience is essential. Keep calm and optimistic - praise and encourage your child when successful and for just trying. All children want to please. It is better not to make an issue of the 'accidents' unless you feel your child was too lazy to ask for the toilet. You should try and get across that you are disappointed that they have not tried, not that they are disappointed that he/she has had an accident.

If you are struggling to toilet train your child, please seek advice or guidance from your Health Care Specialist for support.



Constipation with 'overflow' diagram



Why does 'overflow' diarrhoea occur?

If your child has not had a motion or only passed a small amount of poo for several days, the poo starts to collect in the bowel. The bowel becomes stretched and initially your child will feel like opening their bowels all the time. Eventually the bowel becomes so used to being stretched that your child will no longer feel the need to open their bowels. When new poo arrives in the full bowel it causes any soft liquid poo present to leak out into your child's pants and without them realising it's happening. This is known as 'overflow' diarrhoea.

The longer the poo stays in the bowel the harder it becomes, making it more difficult and painful to pass. Eventually the bowel is so full that it starts to give

out messages which often feel like pain in the tummy (constipation pain). Your child will now get the message that they need to open their bowels. If your child is unable to push the poo out, they will need help by having a laxative medicine, a suppository, or an enema prescribed by their doctor.

High fibre and dietary advice

Why will a high fibre diet help prevent constipation and soiling?

Fibre is part of cereals, fruit and vegetables, which is not digested by the body. It passes through the digestive system, absorbs water and makes the poo softer and bulkier. All high fibre foods need to be taken with plenty of fluids to have an effect. (About six to seven cups of water or water based juice per day).

Foods high in fibre:

- ▶ Wholemeal and granary bread
- ▶ Breakfast cereals, such as Nestlé® Shreddies®, Weetabix®, Bananabix®, All-Bran®, Fruitibix™, Bran Flakes™, Fruit n Fibre™, and Porridge Oats™
- ▶ Brown rice and spaghetti
- ▶ Wholemeal chapatti, pitta and naan bread

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- ▶ High fibre biscuits such as digestive biscuits, flapjacks, oatcakes, Hobnobs®, cereal bars and muesli bars
- ▶ Cakes and pastry made with wholemeal flour
- ▶ Nuts are high in fibre but **do not give nuts to children under 5 years** as small children may choke on them

Medium fibre foods:

- ▶ High fibre white bread, i.e. Best of Both®
- ▶ Fruit, especially dried fruit and fruit which can be eaten with the skin on
- ▶ Vegetables, particularly peas, baked beans, sweetcorn and pulse vegetables, e.g. lentils and chickpeas
- ▶ Jacket potatoes (as long as they eat the skin!)

Foods low in fibre

- ▶ White bread, white biscuits, Rich Tea biscuits™, pastry or cakes made with white flour
- ▶ Breakfast cereals such as Cornflakes®, Rice Krispies® and Frosties®
- ▶ White rice and pasta

Dairy products

Dairy products can 'slow down' the bowels and contribute to constipation. Give cheese and yoghurts in

moderation and not more than a pint (1/2 a litre) of milk per day. It can be difficult to persuade your child that Weetabix®, brown bread, vegetables, etc. are better for them than Rice Krispies®, crisps and chips. If they do have problems, buy a packet of bran from the supermarket or health food shop and mix it in to your child's cereals, home made cakes, gravy, casseroles, etc. There are often ways around it, most children tend to like baked beans!

A high fibre diet is a healthy diet, so why not change the whole family's diet and prevent your child from complaining that they are the only ones having to have a special diet!

Useful books can be found at your local library or the book store.

Websites:



E.R.I.C – Education Resource for Improving Childhood Continence