



Here you can find out about
the signs and symptoms of
childhood constipation

Start here



Follow the arrows and fill in the
answers. If you are concerned
you should always seek medical
advice from your GP.

www.eric.org.uk

1 Does your child typically do
small, hard poots?

Rarely Often

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Does your child strain when they
try to poo and has this led to a
sore or cracked bottom?

Rarely Often

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3a Even if this only occurs from time to time, one
painful poo can make your child anxious and
upset about trying to go to the toilet for a poo.

This happens because when your child holds
poo in or avoids going to the loo for a long
time, they become hard and dry. This makes
them hard and painful to pass.

The skin around the bottom can tear and
become sore and cracked if your child has
to strain. You might notice bright red blood
or light red streaks on your child's stools or
underwear. Treating your child's constipation
should help by making the stools softer and
allowing the skin to heal.

If this does become a problem, please seek
medical advice from your GP.

1a Constipation generally occurs when, for
whatever the reason, your child does not have
a bowel movement often enough. Then, when
they do a poo it can hurt because the poo has
become hard and dry.

You might find a poo chart helpful when talking
to your child about constipation and better
understand what is typical for them. You can
download this from the ERIC website
www.eric.org.uk.

The chart helps assess how long the poo
has spent in the bowel. Type 1 has spent the
longest in the bowel, are hard to pass and
often require a lot of straining.

Type 7 has spent the least time in the bowel
and the need to pass them can be urgent and
accidents may happen.

If you are concerned you should always seek
medical advice from your GP.

2a Every child is different, and what may be
normal for one child may not be for another.

Age	"normal"
3 months – 1 year	4 times a day to once every 2 days
1–3 years	1–2 times a day
3+ years	3 times a day to 3 times a week

These figures are only averages for guidance.
If your child goes less often or more often
than this, it doesn't necessarily mean there's
something wrong. However, if he or she
frequently has small, hard stools (like pellets),
passes a stool less than two times a week
or says that doing a poo hurts, they could be
constipated.

If you are concerned you should always seek
medical advice from your GP.

4 Does your child say that doing a
poo hurts?

Rarely Often

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2 Does your child typically do a poo
less than three times a week?

Rarely Often

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4a Just one painful experiences of pushing out
hard, dry poo can cause your child to become
afraid of doing a poo again. They may avoid
going to the toilet in case it hurts.

Your child may start to hold in poo, but this only
makes the problem worse because:

- The poo starts to build up in your child's bowel
- The next time your child gets the urge to go, it's
even harder and more painful to push the poo out

You can help your child by making sure they
sit on the toilet properly. This means sitting up
straight so that the small tube just before the
anus (the anal canal) will also be straight. This
makes it easier to push poo out. Your child may
need to put his or her feet on a footstool in front
of the toilet.

You can also make going to the toilet more fun
by keeping special treats reserved for the toilet,
such as a favourite book are getting them to
blow bubbles.

If your child says that it hurts to poo, tell him or
her to stop trying, and then try again later.

If you are concerned you should always seek
medical advice from your GP.

5

Does your child sometimes leak watery poo or urine into their underwear?

Rarely

Often

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1	2	3	4	5

Your child may feel uncomfortable using public or school toilets.

Try to encourage your child to do a poo before leaving the house. A good time for this may be after breakfast or lunch, when their bowels are most active. Give your child enough time so they don't feel rushed.

If you are concerned you should always seek medical advice from your GP.

9

Is your child sometimes upset or irritable for no apparent reason?

Rarely

Often

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1	2	3	4	5

If your child develops a constipation that doesn't go away and is affecting family life, it may be time to seek professional help and find a treatment to get them back to normal.

If this does become a problem, please seek medical advice from your GP.

5a

Even if this only occurs from time to time, leaking watery poo or urine is a common sign of constipation and happens because large poo gets stuck and blocks your child's bowel. Liquid stools above the blockage flow around it and are passed out without the child knowing this is happening.

This is often the first sign that parents are aware of that indicates their child has a problem with their bowels. Children can be constipated for many months before soiling starts.

If this does become a problem, please seek medical advice from your GP.

8a

Does your child sometimes feel embarrassed to use a public toilet?

Rarely

Often

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1	2	3	4	5

9a

Most children get constipated from time to time and this can make them upset or irritable. They may need treatment to get back to normal.

If this does become a problem, please seek medical advice from your GP.

6

Does your child often have a tummy ache, cramps or a feeling of being bloated and/or queasy?

Rarely

Often

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1	2	3	4	5

6a

The build-up of poo in your child's bowels can give them cramps and make them feel bloated and queasy. This will go away after your child is able to do a poo.

If you are concerned you should always seek medical advice from your GP.

7a

If your child's poo is dry and hard to pass, some can stay in the bowels after a bowel movement so they may feel like they still have to go.

If you are concerned you should always seek medical advice from your GP.

8

10

Does your child's bowel habit affect them at nursery or school?

Rarely

Often

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1	2	3	4	5

10a

Your child's bowel habit may affect them at nursery and school for a number of reasons. They may feel uncomfortable using public toilets, their appetite may be reduced or they may feel tired and irritable from disturbed sleep problems.

If your child has constipation that doesn't go away and it is affecting their daily life and confidence, it may be time to seek professional help and find a treatment to get them back to normal.

You may also want to speak with a nursery teacher or school nurse to explain the situation and get their help and support.

If you are concerned you should always seek medical advice from your GP.

12

Is constipation causing undue stress and worry for your family?

Rarely

Often

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1	2	3	4	5

11a

If your child has constipation over a long period of time, it may affect their social activities. After school clubs, parties, swimming and other sports activities may make your child feel uncomfortable or anxious.

Supporting and staying with your child during these activities may help them feel more relaxed.

If your child has constipation that doesn't go away and is affecting their daily activities, it may be time to seek professional help and find a treatment to get them back to normal.

If you are concerned you should always seek medical advice from your GP.

11

Does your child's bowel habit affect the types of activities that they and the family can take part in?

Rarely

Often

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1	2	3	4	5

Constipation can sometimes go unnoticed by parents, particularly as children may not always want to, or be able to, describe how they feel. Even if the common symptoms described here don't seem to apply to your child, speaking with a doctor is the best way to determine whether your child is suffering from constipation.