

Constipation



What is constipation?

Constipation is an abnormal pattern of bowel movements where stools are harder or passed less frequently than usual. A child may have repeated episodes of tummy pain if he or she is constipated.

Everyone has a different bowel pattern. It may be normal for a child to have bowel movements 2 to 4 times daily or once every 2 to 3 days. It is not uncommon for breastfed babies to have large and soft bowel movements without pain up to 7 days apart.

What causes constipation?

Constipation in most infants and children is not caused by any serious medical condition. Some of the factors that may contribute to the onset of constipation are:

- Lack of fibre-rich foods and inadequate fluid intake in the diet.
- Poor bowel habits, problems with toilet training or unwillingness to spend time in the toilet.
- Small tears at the bowel opening (anus).
- Consumption of certain medications such as iron supplements.
- Having symptoms such as vomiting or fever, where a lot of fluids in the body may be lost.

How do I prevent my child from getting constipation?

- Ensure that your child's diet contains adequate fluids and fibre-rich foods that act as natural laxatives. Examples of fibre-rich foods include:
 - Cereals
 - Fruits such as apples, pears, papaya, prunes and peaches
 - Vegetables such as beans, peas and spinach
- If your child is more than 6 months old, introduce fibre-rich foods to his or her strained or pureed food twice daily.
- Do not give your child an enema or suppository (medicine administered in the rectum) unless advised by your doctor.
- Help your child to establish regular bowel habits when he or she is about 2 to 3 years old. Spend

a few minutes in the toilet or on the potty once or twice daily immediately after meals. If he or she is small in size, a footrest is necessary so that the legs do not dangle and the knees are in a crouched position.

- Encourage your child to pass out stools completely by minimising distractions around him or her. Have your child spend an extra few minutes on the potty even after he or she thinks that the routine is done.

What should I do if my child has constipation?

- If your child has severe pain around the anus during a bowel movement, there may be a tear at the anus. Do visit a doctor, who may prescribe some medicine to be applied around the area to ease the pain.
- If the tummy pain is severe, your child's doctor may prescribe some medicine to help soften your child's stool. An enema may be necessary to help clear out the existing hard stool.
- Be patient. Improvement may be slow and it can take several weeks of active treatment before your child returns to his or her normal bowel pattern.
- Always consult your child's doctor before giving a laxative.
- Do not punish your child if he or she does not have a bowel movement or soils his or her underclothes.

Bring your child to a doctor if:

- Your child's general health, appetite or activity seems to be affected.
- Your child has severe tummy pain.
- There is blood in the stool.
- Your child cannot pass a bowel movement after 4 days despite increasing fibre-rich foods and fluid intake in the diet.
- Your child loses some control of his or her bowel actions and begins to soil the underclothes.

The information provided in this publication is meant purely for educational purposes and may not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. You should seek the advice of your doctor or a qualified healthcare provider before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical condition.

About the Khoo Teck Puat - National University Children's Medical Institute (KTP-NUCMI)

The KTP-NUCMI is the paediatric arm of the National University Hospital and comprises the Departments of Paediatrics, Paediatric Surgery and Neonatology. We provide comprehensive and specialised medical and surgical services for newborns, children and adolescents, and are the only public hospital in Singapore that offers paediatric kidney and liver transplant programmes. Through a generous gift from the Estate of Khoo Teck Puat, we have set up an integrated outpatient facility with medical, diagnostic and rehabilitation services.

For more information about us, visit www.nuh.com.sg/ktp-nucmi.

Contact Us

24-hour Children's Emergency

Location: NUH Main Building, Zone F, Level 1

General Enquiry: +65 6772 5000

KTP-NUCMI

Location: NUH Main Building, Zone E, Level 2

(Accessible via Kent Ridge Wing, Zone C, Level 2, Lift Lobby C)

Operating Hours: 8.30am - 5.30pm (Mon to Fri), 8.30am - 12.30pm (Sat)

General Enquiry: +65 6772 5736

Appointment Line: +65 6908 2222

Email: ktpnucmi_appt@nuhs.edu.sg

9a Viva-University Children's Cancer Centre

Location: NUH Medical Centre, Zone B, Level 9

Operating Hours: 8am - 5.30pm (Mon to Fri)

Appointment Line: +65 6772 5030

Fax: +65 6872 4314

Email: cbccappt@nuhs.edu.sg

NUH Children's Urgent Care Clinic @ Bukit Panjang

Location: Junction 10, 1 Woodlands Road, #01-22, Singapore 677899

Operating Hours: 9am - 11pm daily (including public holidays)

General Enquiry: +65 6219 1538

Email: childreucc@nuhs.edu.sg

Website: www.nuh.com.sg/ucc

NUH Child Development Unit @ JMC

Location: Jurong Medical Centre,

60 Jurong West Central 3, Level 2, Singapore 648346

Operating Hours: 8.30am - 5.30pm (Mon to Fri)

Appointment Line: +65 6665 2530/2531

Fax: +65 6665 0158

Email: cdu@nuhs.edu.sg

Website: www.nuh.com.sg/cdu

NUH Child Development Unit @ Keat Hong

Location: Keat Hong Community Club,

2 Choa Chu Kang Loop, #03-01, Singapore 689687

Operating Hours: 8.30am - 5.30pm (Mon to Fri)

Appointment Line: +65 6769 4537/4637

Fax: +65 6665 0158

Email: cdu@nuhs.edu.sg

Website: www.nuh.com.sg/cdu

National University Hospital

Location: 5 Lower Kent Ridge Road, Singapore 119074

Tel: +65 6908 2222

Email: contactus@nuhs.edu.sg

Website: www.nuh.com.sg



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