

Constipation

Easy to treat

Constipation is a very common problem in children. Many children normally pass stools as far apart as every few days. Regardless, you should treat hard stools that are difficult to pass, and those that happen only every three days, as constipation.

Breastfed infants will generally have more stools per day. Their stools vary more in frequency when compared to bottle-fed infants. For example, breastfed infants produce anywhere from five to 40 bowel movements per week whereas formula-fed infants have five to 28 bowel movements per week. Switching the type of milk or formula can also cause constipation.

Many things contribute to constipation but infants and children who get well-balanced meals typically are not constipated.

Ask your health visitor for advice. In rare cases, constipation can be due to an underlying illness, so if the problem doesn't go away in a few days, it's important to talk to your GP.

Health visitor says

To avoid constipation and help stop it coming back, make sure your child has a balanced diet including plenty of fibre such as fruit, vegetables, baked beans and wholegrain breakfast cereals. We do not recommend unprocessed bran (an ingredient in some foods), which can cause bloating, flatulence (wind) and reduce the absorption of micronutrients. Drink plenty of fluids.

Bottle fed baby

If a bottle fed baby becomes constipated you can try offering cooled boiled water between feeds (never dilute baby milk). If the problem doesn't go away, talk to your health visitor or GP again.

1

If your child is constipated, they may find it painful to go to the toilet.

2

Does my child have a balanced diet?

3

Ask your health visitor or pharmacist whether a suitable laxative may help.

Source: NICE guidelines 2009, constipation in children