

Neurogenic Bowel

Problem-solving tips

If your child has a neurogenic bowel, it can be hard for them to feel when they need to have a bowel movement. A bowel training program is one way to prevent problems from a neurogenic bowel.

What is Neurogenic Bowel?

Some children have a hard time feeling when they need to have a bowel movement. This is called a “neurogenic bowel.” If your child has a neurogenic bowel, they might have problems with constipation or have stool accidents, like soiling their underwear. You can help your child with this problem by making sure that they eat a high fiber diet, drink plenty of fluids and take medicine that your child’s doctor orders.

This flyer covers the basics of a successful bowel program. It includes a description of typical problems that your child may have and some tips on how to help solve them.

Setting Up a Daily Bowel-Emptying Program

Bowel program basics:

The younger your child starts good bowel habits, the easier it will be to prevent problems. Help them to start a daily routine as soon as possible. A good time to start is around when most children start potty training, when they are 2 or 3 years old.

- Have your child drink 8 glasses of liquid a day. At least 4 of these should be water.
- Have your child eat more fiber. It is best to follow current fiber guidelines:

Daily fiber needs for children

Age 2 to 3 years 19 grams per day

Age 4 to 8 years 25 grams per day

Age 9 to 11 years 26 grams per day for girls, 31 grams per day for boys

- If your child is a picky eater, it may be helpful to use a fiber supplement. You can get these at the drugstore. There are many fiber substitutes made for children. They come in chewable pills, capsules and other forms. You can ask your child’s healthcare provider which they would recommend.
- Keep a log or diary and write down diet and bowel movements. Look for what foods seem to work well and what foods seem to cause problems.
- Set regular sitting times on the toilet. Pick a regular time after a meal or a warm bath to sit your child on the toilet.

- Use special devices to adapt your toilet for comfort. Place a stool under your child's feet so their legs do not dangle. This will help your child to relax. Use toilet seat adapters for small bottoms. Make sure a bathroom is always available.
- Use gentle massage on the stomach to help move stool through the colon. To do this, place your hand over your child's belly area and move from your child's left to their right. A good time to do this is right before bed each night, or at other times your child is having a difficult time with bowel movements.
- Consider giving medicines for softening, lubricating, stimulating or bulking up the stool.
- Discuss other options and methods with your nurse or doctor. It may take a combination of treatments to achieve a successful bowel program.
- Be patient with yourself and with your child.

Common Problems and Tips to Solve Them

Accidents

- Have your child sit on the toilet for a long enough time to empty their bowel more completely. This should be for about 15 minutes at a time.
- Have your child sit on the toilet and try to have a bowel movement before doing the following things:
 - Exercising
 - Swimming
 - Traveling
- Remember that if your child has an accident, they do not do it on purpose. Be creative in helping your child to succeed. Work together to create a bowel program that works.

Large or Hard and Dry Stool

- Increase liquids and fiber in diet. Make sure your child is drinking 8 glasses of liquid a day (at least 4 of them should be water). Refer to the fiber chart on page 1.
- Give lubricant, laxatives or softener to assist with release of stool. Ask your child's healthcare provider about what kinds work best.
- The goal is for stool to be narrower in size and to have a softer, toothpaste-like consistency.
- Your child may need enemas or stool softeners each day until they are able to pass stool without pain or until stool size gets smaller.
- Keep a record, and monitor the progress. Note if there is a change in size, hardness or number.

To Learn More

- Neurodevelopmental/
Birth Defects Clinics
206-987-2210
- Your child's
healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Liquid Stool

Liquid stool is a bowel movement that is very watery. This is different from diarrhea, which is a mixture of harder stool and liquid stool.

- Sometimes liquid will leak around a hard ball of constipated stool.
- Liquid stool does not always mean you should stop or use less bowel medicine or fiber. But if your child has diarrhea, you may need to give your child less bowel medicine. Call your child's healthcare provider to find out what to do.

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers
206-987-2280 (TTY)

Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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10/09
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