

# Neurogenic Bowel

## Problem-solving tips

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

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### 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” (Neuro-GEN-ick bow-el). 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 their doctor orders. This handout covers typical problems that your child may have, tips on how to solve them and the basics of successful bowel management:

- Predictable bowel movements
  - Staying accident free in social settings (such as school)
  - Independence
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## 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. This will allow your child to have predicable bowel movements and avoid stool accidents in social settings. A good time to start is when they are 2 or 3 years old.

- Have your child drink 8 glasses of liquid a day. At least 4 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.
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### To Learn More

- Neurodevelopmental/  
Birth Defects Clinics  
206-987-2210
- Ask your child’s healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your 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.

- Set regular sitting times on the toilet. After meals or a warm bath are often good times to have your child sit. 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. It also helps prevent straining. 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 right to their left. A good time to do this is right before bed, 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. Talk with your healthcare provider about these options.
- 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. Difficulty with bowel movements and stooling accidents are not their fault. It takes a combination of medicine and behavior changes to have success with bowel management.

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## 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. If your child has a rectal prolapse, it may be shorter and you should ask your healthcare provider.
- 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 your child's diet. Make sure your child is drinking 8 glasses of liquid a day (at least 4 of them should be water). Follow 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 would be best for your child.
- The goal is for your child to have daily soft, toothpaste-like stools.
- Your child may need enemas or stool softeners each day to have daily soft stools.
- Watch their progress and keep a simple record or diary. Note if there is a change in size, hardness or number of stools. Use our handout "Bristol Stool Chart" [seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE2405.pdf](http://seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE2405.pdf).

### 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. Contact your child's healthcare provider if you child has liquid stool.