



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A condition in which a child over age four passes bowel movements (stools) on a regular basis into places other than a toilet.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Bowel movements in underwear. Sometimes the bowel movements may be on the floor or other places.
- Not able to control bowel movements.
- Hard bowel movements.
- Secretive behavior about bowel movements.
- The child has a bad smell.
- The child may or may not have constipation.

CAUSES

There may be a physical or emotional factor, or both, involved. The child may be able to control the bowel movement, but chooses not to. The child may not be able to control the bowel movement. The child may have a more liquid bowel movement that leaks out.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Boys are affected more often than girls.
- Constipation or diarrhea.
- A physical or emotional change in the child's life, such as the birth of a sibling or recent illness with diarrhea.
- Resistance to using the toilet because of too much pressure to do so.
- Painful bowel movements.
- Resistance to using toilet facilities at school, on camping trips, or outdoor toilets.
- Eating problems that cause constipation.
- Problems due to mental abilities or a medical illness that affects the colon.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid undue emphasis on toilet training. Approach it calmly, with realistic expectations. Don't shame or blame the child for accidents.
- Be sensitive to stressful situations that your child faces. Talk together about the child's feelings.
- Maintain good diet and nutrition for your child.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable. Parents need to be patient. It may take time for the problem to get better.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Child may suffer from embarrassment, shame, guilt, and low self-esteem.
- Skin rash in rectal area.
- Chronic constipation.
- Stool impaction (hard bowel movement remains in the colon).



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your child's health care provider will do a physical exam. Questions will be asked about the child's symptoms and other areas of the child's life. Medical tests may be done to check for illness or a physical problem.
- Treatment usually consists of diet changes, behavior training, and sometimes drugs, such as laxatives or stool softeners. Each child is different and will respond to different treatment steps. Follow any special instructions from your child's health care provider.
- Respond gently to accidents. For children who are old enough, have them clean themselves and change into clean underwear. Don't blame, criticize, restrict, or punish the child for accidents. This may cause the child to give up, as well as lead to other emotional problems.
- After meals, have the child sit on the toilet for about 10 minutes. Praise the child for having bowel movements in the toilet. Give a reward for staying clean all day.
- Ask for the school's help. The child needs quick access to the bathroom at school, especially if shy or new at school.
- Don't make this problem the main focus of the child's or your family's life. Do try to identify stresses in the child's life and make every effort to ease them. Consider counseling for the child if needed.

MEDICATIONS

Lubricant laxatives or other types may be used. Enemas or suppositories may be needed for an impaction.

ACTIVITY

No limits.

DIET

Provide a diet high in fiber with plenty of fruits and vegetables. Use whole-grain products for cereals and breads. Be sure your child drinks enough fluids.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- Your child has encopresis, and it persists longer than 2 months, despite your efforts.
- Your child has a fever, diarrhea, hard or bloody bowel movements, or there is blood around the rectum.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page