Let's Talk About...

Constipation

Constipation is when your child does not have a bowel movement (stool or poop) as often as normal, and when that bowel movement is difficult to get out, dry, and painful. Constipation is a common problem in children. Normal bowel movements should be mostly soft and easy to pass. The normal schedule for bowel movements is different for each child. It can be as much as three bowel movements a day and as little as three a week.

What causes constipation?

- Stress and travel can cause irregular bowel movements. Some examples of stressful events include:
  - Moving to a new home
  - Using a different bathroom
  - Toilet training
  - A new baby in the family
- It can be painful and frightening for a child to pass hard stool. This can lead to a fear of going to the bathroom. Your child may learn to hold their bowel movements in to avoid pain. This causes more hard stools.
- Some medicines can cause more constipation. Ask your doctor if you have any questions about your child's medicines.

Are there some things I can do at home for my child?

Diet

Encourage healthy eating to help prevent constipation.

- Give your child regular meals with plenty of whole grains, nuts, vegetables, and fruits (smoothies with yogurt and fruit are fine).

Habits to Live By	
Daily Routine	• Eat breakfast soon after waking up • Establish regular meal times • Establish a daily exercise routine
Diet	• Eat a well-balanced diet at every meal • Eat five fruits and vegetables every day
Toileting	• After the morning and evening meal, walk 10 minutes and then sit on the toilet • If there's still no bowel movement, walk again.

- Try to avoid foods that slow down digestion. These include the following:
  - Refined foods (for example, sweets, white bread, and fast food)
  - Foods high in fat (for example, fast food, French fries)
  - Large amounts of dairy products (for example, milk, cheese, and ice cream)
- Make sure your child drinks enough water every day. Your child or teen should drink 5-8 cups of water every day, and younger children should drink 3-4 cups daily.

Exercise

Physical activity can help with constipation. Moving around helps the muscles in the intestines tighten and move naturally. When these muscles tighten, stool moves out more quickly.

- A 10-15 minute walk after meals can help your child have a bowel movement.

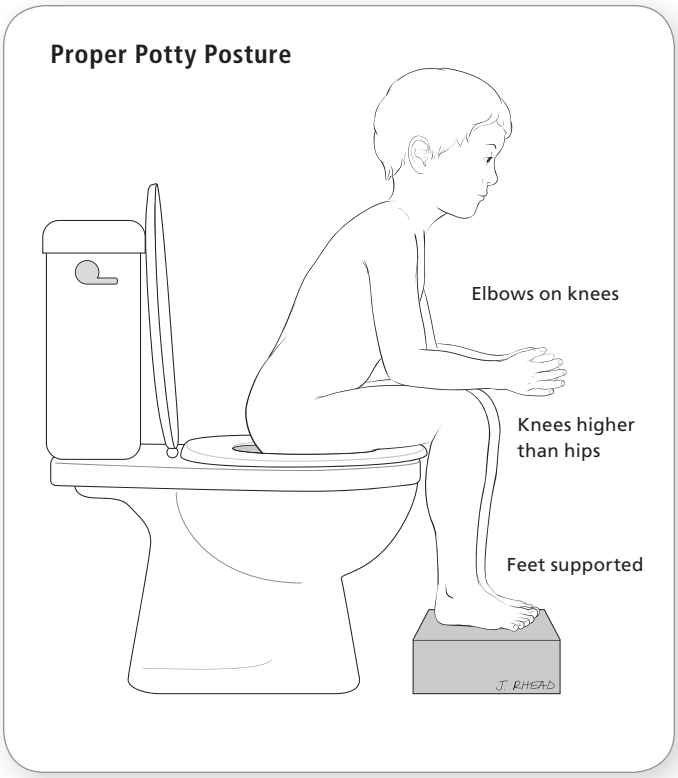
Warm Baths

A warm bath at least once a day can help relax the muscles in the rectum (where the stool is). This makes it easier for your child to have a bowel movement.

Toilet Time

It can be helpful to SET a toileting routine. Be clear that your child does not have to produce stool during this time, but that sitting on the toilet regularly is a good habit to practice.

- Sometimes children get too involved in what they are doing (playing) to stop and go to the bathroom.
- Encourage your child to go to the bathroom when they have the urge.
- You may want to have a "kit" of materials to distract your child and help him relax while he is sitting on the toilet. This could include books, toys, music, videos, or hand-held games.
- Have your child sit on the toilet at the same time for at least 10 minutes every day.
- Make sure that your child sits in a position that promotes bowel movement, with his feet supported, knees raised, and elbows resting on his knees.



Follow-Up with Your Child's Regular Doctor

If good bowel habits (like those above) do not help with your child's constipation, he may need medicine to help him produce regular stools. Your doctor can tell you the treatment that is best for you and your child, and how long he might need to take medicine. Some children need to take constipation medicine for months or years.

Intermountain
Primary Children's Hospital
The Child First and Always®

© 2014 Intermountain Healthcare, Primary Children's Hospital. All rights reserved. The content presented here is for your information only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, and it should not be used to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease. Please consult your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns. More health information is available at **intermountainhealthcare.org. Pediatric Education Services 801-662-3500 LTA520408179 - 04/14** *Also available in Spanish.*