What is a bowel management program?
A bowel management program is a planned way to clean the large intestine (colon) of stool (poop) regularly. It helps your child stay clean, avoid accidents, and wear regular underwear.

Why does my child need a bowel management program?
Your child may need a bowel management program if they have problems with bowel control, including constipation or fecal incontinence.

To pass stool normally, your child must:
• Be able to feel that stool or gas are in their rectum
• Have good wave-like motion (peristalsis) to push the stool through the rectum
• Have a working external sphincter, the muscle they control to keep stool in until they can poop in a toilet

Your child may have bowel control problems because of other medical problems, which may include
• Anorectal malformations (imperforate anus)
• Hirschsprung’s disease
• Spina bifida
• Spinal cord injuries
• Brain injuries

What is fecal incontinence?
Fecal incontinence, or soiling, occurs when a child cannot hold stool. Your child may have:

• True fecal incontinence (FEE-cull in-CON-tin-ence): The bowel control muscles or nerves don’t work because they didn’t develop normally or were damaged. These may include sphincters (ring-like muscles that control the anus) and rectal nerves that feel stool is present in the rectum.

• Pseudo-incontinence (SUE-doe-in-CON-tin-ence): Severe constipation can cause a condition called pseudo-incontinence. When a child is severely constipated, the stool gets hard and stuck in the colon (called fecal impaction). Liquid stool then leaks around the hard stool and causes soiling. Once the fecal impaction and constipation have been treated, a child can hold stool and have normal bowel movements.

Children born with anorectal malformations (imperforate anus) and spinal cord problems like spina bifida may have true fecal incontinence. If your child has true fecal incontinence, a bowel management program can help them.

What are the benefits of a bowel management program?
A bowel management program can improve your child’s quality of life, prevent accidents, protect their skin, and help them have regular, formed bowel movements. It can give your child a new sense of self-esteem and confidence.
How does my child start a bowel management program?

Your child’s healthcare provider will create a bowel management program based on their specific needs. They will do certain tests, which may include:

- A contrast enema (enema during a colon x-ray) to see if the colon is larger than normal or moves too slowly or quickly
- A physical exam
- Abdominal x-rays to see how much stool is still in the colon

The healthcare provider will review the test results and create a program that includes consistency, positioning, diet, and medicine. It may take a week or longer to create the bowel management program right for your child, and your child may need more changes later.

What are the parts of the bowel management program?

A bowel management program includes:

- **Consistency:** Complete the bowel management program at the same time every day.
- **Timing:** The intestines have a natural wave-like motion 30 minutes after eating a meal, so help your child complete the program at this time.
- **Positioning:** Have your child sit up with their feet supported during the bowel management program. If your child’s feet don’t touch the ground while sitting on the toilet, use a stool for support. Have your child lie on their left side if they can’t sit up.
- **Diet:** Your child’s healthcare provider will help you determine the diet your child needs to prevent accidents and stay healthy.
  - **Constipating diet:** If your child has diarrhea, a constipating diet can help slow down the colon and lessen the amount of stool in the lower bowel. It includes white bread, applesauce, bananas, lean meat (baked, broiled, or grilled) and limited fats and sugars. Give your child a multivitamin with calcium every day while they eat this diet. As the diarrhea is controlled, you can add more foods to your child’s diet.
  - **High-fiber diet:** If your child has constipation, drinking plenty of water and eating a high-fiber diet can help. It includes fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, seeds, and legumes (beans and lentils). Fiber is something the body can’t digest.
- **Medicine:** If a diet change is not enough to produce a daily bowel movement or decrease diarrhea, your child’s healthcare provider may add medicine to the bowel management program. Some medicines help make the stool softer, while others help the body push the stool out. These may include:
How can I help my child with their bowel management program?

Help your child and other caregivers be patient and consistent with the bowel management program so it is effective. Each program is different for each child and may include changes in diet, enemas, and medicines. Some children may need more changes to their bowel management program as they continue to develop.

If you have questions about your child’s bowel management program, call your child’s healthcare provider.

Notes

- Laxatives (Senekot®, Exlax®, Miralax® or bisacodyl)
- Fiber supplements (pectin, Citrucel®, or Benefiber®)
- Loperamide (Imodium®)

**Enemas:** An enema is a way to put fluid into the rectum and lower intestine to empty the stool. It can manage constipation, empty the bowel if your child can’t control bowel movements, or clean the bowel before surgery. Your child’s healthcare provider may recommend a daily enema to manage your child’s bowel.