

Repeated involuntary stool soiling in children: practical tips

Children usually learn how to control their sphincters by the time they start school, at the age of 3, but it is quite common for them to have an occasional leak. Sometimes a healthy child over the age of 5 repeatedly has uncontrollable faecal soiling. This may affect their relationships with other children and their teachers and it is a source of concern for their parents.

Why does it happen?

It may be because, on one occasion, the bowel movement was painful because of **constipation** or because the child doesn't want to stop what he or she is doing to go to the toilet when they need to... and in the end they lose control.

Constipation may be caused by a low-fibre diet. The lack of fibre causes the stools to become backed up in the intestines; this irritates the mucous lining, and causes a false diarrhoea to leak out, which is impossible for the child to control and confuses the parents even more.

What can we do?

You can encourage the child to go to the toilet every time that he or she feels the need, without leaving it for later, making it easy for them to go to the toilet even during class. You can also encourage them to go if you see that they're crossing their legs to hold in a bowel movement.

From now on, every time the child soils his or her pants, even though it displeases you, you should **avoid expressing disgust, anger or reproof**: you shouldn't give "negative attention", because it is still attention. Be as encouraging and reassuring as you can: "**You can do it**".

It is essential to **avoid constipation** by drinking plenty of water and complementing it with a high-fibre diet in the main meals: vegetables (green beans, broccoli, squash, courgette, pulses, etc.) salads (lettuce, tomato, etc.) wholemeal bread, 2 pieces of fruit a day, preferably easy to peel or eaten with the skin on).



Promote toilet habits

It's preferable to create the routine that best suits each individual child: it is advisable to go to the bathroom when they get up and spend 4 to 6 minutes sitting on the toilet, or else go in the afternoon if this suits them better. If this works, it's noted on a calendar as a success. If it doesn't work, not to worry, you can try again the next day. If on the third day the efforts still haven't been productive, then it's time to consider using an enema to help expel the blockage and restore the flow of bowel movements.

Try to avoid insisting too much or obliging the child to sit on the toilet two or three times a day, or until something comes out, because it will lead to even more rejection on the child's part.

To reinforce the new habits, we suggest using a reward scheme. For example, a **point system** for the days when the child hasn't soiled their pants, leading to a reward, such as a fun activity with family or friends (**a positive reinforcement: to make the child feel proud of doing well**).



Participation in the improvement

Depending on the child's age, when he or she soils their pants, they can **participate** to different degrees in their personal hygiene and in washing and collecting their clothes. It is not a punishment, but a sign that they are old enough to help you and look after their own things.

Don't expect a miracle from these changes, but if you have plenty of patience and stick to your