

## Make trips to the potty routine

When your child seems to need to urinate or have a bowel movement, go to the potty. Keep your child seated on the potty for only a few minutes at a time. Explain what you want to happen. Be cheerful and casual. If she protests strongly, do not insist. Such resistance may mean that it is not the right time to start training.

It may be helpful to make trips to the potty a regular part of your child's daily routine, such as first thing in the morning when your child wakes up, after meals, or before naps. Remember that you cannot control when your child urinates or has a bowel movement.

Success at toilet training depends on teaching at a pace that suits your child. You must support your child's efforts. Do not try to force quick results. Encourage your child with lots of hugs and praise when success occurs. When a mistake happens, treat it lightly and try not to get upset. Punishment and scolding will often make children feel bad and may make toilet training take longer.

Teach your child proper hygiene habits. Show your child how to wipe carefully. (Girls should wipe thoroughly from front to back to prevent bringing germs from the rectum to the vagina or bladder.) Make sure both boys and girls learn to wash their hands well after urinating or a bowel movement.

Some children believe that their wastes are part of their bodies; seeing their stools flushed away may be frightening and hard for them to understand. Some also fear they will be sucked into the toilet if it is flushed while they are sitting on it. Parents should explain the purpose of body wastes. To give your child a feeling of control, let her flush pieces of toilet paper. This will lessen the fear of the sound of rushing water and the sight of things disappearing.

## Encourage the use of training pants

Once your child has repeated successes, encourage the use of training pants. This moment will be special. Your child will feel proud of this sign of trust and growing up. However, be prepared for "accidents." It may take weeks, even months, before toilet training is completed. Continue to have your child sit on the potty at specified times during the day. If your child uses the potty successfully, it is an opportunity for praise. If not, it is still good practice.

In the beginning, many children will have a bowel movement or will urinate right after being taken off the toilet. It may take time for your child to learn how to relax the muscles that control the bowel and bladder. If these "accidents" happen a lot, it may mean your child is not really ready for training.

Sometimes your child will ask for a diaper when a bowel movement is expected and stand in a special place to defecate. Instead of considering this a failure, praise your child for recognizing the bowel signals. Suggest that he have the bowel movement in the bathroom while wearing a diaper. Encourage improvements and work toward sitting on the potty without the diaper. If this behavior continues for more than a few weeks, consult your pediatrician. It may represent a power struggle or fear.

Stooling patterns vary. Some children move their bowels 2 or 3 times a day. Others may go 2 or 3 days between movements. Soft, comfortable stools brought about by a well-balanced diet make training easier for both child and parent. Trying too hard to toilet train your child before he is ready can result in long-term problems with bowel movements.

Talk with your pediatrician if there is a change in the nature of the bowel movements or if your child becomes uncomfortable. Do not use laxatives, suppositories, or enemas unless your pediatrician advises these for your child.

Most children achieve bowel control and daytime urine control by 3 to 4 years of age. Even after your child is able to stay dry during the day, it may take months or years before he achieves the same success at night. Most girls and more than 75% of boys will be able to stay dry at night after 5 years of age.

Most of the time, your child will let you know when he is ready to move from the potty chair to the "big toilet." Make sure your child is tall enough, and practice the actual steps with him. Provide a stool to brace his feet.

## Your pediatrician can help

If any concerns come up before, during, or after toilet training, talk with your pediatrician. Often the problem is minor and can be resolved quickly, but sometimes physical or emotional causes will require treatment. Your pediatrician's help, advice, and encouragement can help make toilet training easier. Also, your pediatrician is trained to identify and manage problems that are more serious.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

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of Pediatrics



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