

# ■ Toilet Training ■

Toilet training is an important step in your child's development. Children are ready for toilet training at different times. The key to success is waiting until your child is ready, setting up regular toilet times, and praising your child when his or her efforts succeed. Talk to your doctor if you have questions or concerns about toilet training.

## When should toilet training start?

There is really no time that is right or “normal” for every child. To toilet train successfully, your child needs to be physically ready. This means knowing when it's time to go, being able to hold it for at least a little while, and being able to let you know when he or she needs to go, even by facial expressions. Often, children who are ready for toilet training simply don't like wet, dirty diapers and want to wear underwear.

For most children, toilet training starts anywhere between 2 and 4 years—many kids aren't ready before age 2. The decision to start toilet training often depends on circumstances such as starting day care. Toilet training should never be forced and should never be a power struggle between parent and child. When starting toilet training, choose a time when things are relaxed—not too many errands to run, no stressful events in the home.

In general, girls tend to be toilet trained earlier than boys. Most children achieve bowel control (controlling bowel movements [BMs]) before they achieve bladder control (controlling urination). As in adults, the frequency of BMs varies in children. They may occur a couple of times a day or once every few days. Either way, BMs should be soft and not uncomfortable to pass.

## How should I toilet train my child?

No single approach to toilet training is right for every child. The keys are to establish a regular toilet routine and to be patient!

- Choose a potty chair. Having their own potty chair is more comfortable for children. A potty chair also lets your child's feet touch the floor, which is reassuring.
- Having the child watch parents or siblings go to the bathroom can be helpful.
- Praise your child's efforts at potty training, even if he or she tells you they already went. Don't be negative or angry if your child has occasional “accidents”—they are a normal part of toilet training. If accidents are happening a lot, it may mean that your child isn't ready for toilet training.

- If your child says or shows signs that he or she needs to go to the bathroom, then take him or her to the potty chair. Boys usually learn to urinate sitting down at first.
- Your child should sit on the potty for a few minutes, whether he or she goes or not. Schedule potty trips before and after naps, after meals—every couple of hours.
- Keep the mood positive and light. If your child insists on not sitting on the potty, don't force the issue. This may mean that he or she isn't ready.
- Teach your child how to wipe with toilet paper. Girls should wipe from front to back to avoid spreading stool (BM) to the vagina. Teach your child to wash and dry his or her hands after using the potty.
- When your child is getting the idea, try switching to training pants. These are special underpants that act like diapers in case of accidents.
- Some children are afraid of flushing the toilet. Give your child some time to get used to the idea of moving from a potty seat to the big toilet.
- Toilet training can take weeks or even months. As always, be patient; even in the most difficult cases, toilet training happens eventually!

## What kinds of problems can occur?

- Temporary setbacks or “accidents” are a normal part of toilet training. If the parent is patient and accepting, they gradually become less frequent.
- Frequent accidents (wetting or soiling) may mean that your child isn't yet ready for toilet training. If this happens, it's OK to go back to diapers for a little while. Try again when your child shows more signs of readiness.
- Another possible problem is constipation—difficult or uncomfortable BMs. Call our office if this occurs.
- Sometimes children who have been successfully toilet-trained go back to having accidents again. This may be related to some kind of stressful event in your child's life, for example, moving to a new house. It may help to try talking to your child about the issue. Other medical reasons are possible; call our office if the problem continues.
- Some children have physical or medical problems that delay toilet training or make it impossible (for example, various types of developmental delay or medical problems involving the urinary or gastrointestinal system). Your doctor will discuss with you how to handle these situations.

 **When should I call your office?**

Call our office if:

- You have questions about toilet training.
- Your previously toilet-trained child starts having accidents again.
- Your child has difficult or uncomfortable BMs (constipation).