

# Encopresis/Stool Soiling

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Encopresis is a condition that affects 1-3% of toddlers begin soiling themselves without their control. Unlike *Functional Encopresis* where toilet training was either never achieved or children purposely soil themselves, Primary Encopresis appears after toilet training has long been established. It is widely believed that the main cause of encopresis is long-term constipation, which causes a desensitization of the nerves and muscles of the pelvic floor causing leakage of stool. Children build up stool in their colon and small portions exit the body without the child feeling it. When the child eventually does feel the impulse to have a bowel movement, the stools are so large that to pass them causes significant pain and sometimes anal fissures. The result is a child who becomes scared to have a bowel movement and may hold onto stool even in the presence of physical stimulation. Encopresis can be an embarrassing shameful condition for children which can negatively affect their self esteem. Many parents who do not understand the condition punish their children for soiling themselves. Families often suffer through the condition and feel uncomfortable talking about it, not realizing how many children face the same issue.

The following are signs of encopresis and warrant a doctor visit:

- poop or liquid stool in the underwear when your child isn't ill
- hard poop or pain when having a bowel movement
- Very large bowel movements which may stop up the toilet
- abdominal pain with constipation
- loss of appetite just before large passage of stool

The Naturopathic medical approach to correct encopresis is to first address the cause of toddler constipation. I have successfully treated encopresis by testing for and avoiding food allergies, rewarding the child for successful toilet time, providing a wholesome high fiber diet and giving appropriate nutritional supplementation. It is important to be patient while treating children with encopresis as recurrence is common, and may take anywhere from several months to a year for the muscles and nerves of the colon to recover fully.

