

### Advice Note: Encopresis

Dear GP,

Thank you for your referral for this child with encopresis (soiling).

Soiling is almost always caused by long lasting constipation and is a very common problem in children. The treatment of constipation and encopresis takes time. Treatment should continue for months or sometimes years to allow the bowel size and sensation to return to normal. Organic problems are very rare.

**Please refer to the healthpathway for constipation in children for assessment and management of children with this problem.**  
**<https://3d.healthpathways.org.nz/index.htm>**

Key points include:

- **Assessment :**
  - After taking appropriate history, perform examination including :
    - Abdominal examination
    - Inspection of anus, especially in infants
    - Spine and lower limb neurology
  - Investigations, including blood tests or imaging, are not routinely indicated and should only be requested if appropriate treatment is ineffective
  
- **Management :**
  - Education and reassurance – see healthpathway for resources for the family
  - Disimpaction (if required) followed by regular laxatives for a prolonged period– **see healthpathways for appropriate doses of laxatives in children** . Most commonly used laxatives include:
    - Lactulose – usual dose 2- 3ml/kg/day
    - Macrogol
      - initially up to 4 sach / day in up to 6 year olds for disimpaction
      - Initially up to 6 sach/day in 6-12 year olds for disimpaction
      - Initially up to 8 sach/day in >12 year olds for disimpaction,
      - reduced to a regular dose to achieve 1-2 soft bowel motions a day
  - Dietary advice including fluid intake
  - Behavioral component with regular routine of sitting on the toilet at least twice a day for at least 5 minutes with appropriate rewards

**Please do not hesitate to re-refer to Paediatrics if:**

- Suspected organic cause
  - please explain in the referral why you suspect this to help us prioritize your referral
- Fecal impaction which has not responded to appropriate disimpaction regimen as per healthpathways
  - please document the doses of laxatives used in the referral as **the most common cause for failure of treatment is inadequate dosing**
- The child has been receiving adequate doses of medication but treatment is not effective:
  - Please document the doses of laxatives used

Kind regards,

*Hutt Paediatric Team*