

# Toilet Training

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## When is the right time to start toilet training?

There is no set age at which toilet training should begin. Before children are 12 months of age, they have no control over bladder or bowel movements. While many children start to show signs of being ready between 18 and 24 months of age, some children may not be ready until 30 months or older. This is normal.

Most children achieve bowel control and daytime urine control by 3 to 4 years of age. However, 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 children are able to stay dry at night after 5 years of age.

*Signs that your child may be ready include the following:*

- Your child stays dry at least 2 hours at a time during the day or is dry after naps.
- Bowel movements become regular and predictable.
- You can tell when your child is about to urinate or have a bowel movement.
- Your child can follow simple instructions.
- Your child can walk to and from the bathroom and help undress.
- Your child seems uncomfortable with soiled diapers and wants to be changed.
- Your child asks to use the toilet or potty chair.
- Your child asks to wear "big-kid" underwear.

**Note:** Some child care programs require children to be toilet trained as a requirement for enrollment. Don't let this be a threat to your child; it may be an incentive for her to cooperate in the toilet training process.

Major changes in the home may make toilet training more difficult. Sometimes it is a good idea to delay toilet training if:

- Your family has just moved or will move in the near future.
- You are expecting a baby or you have recently had a new baby.
- There is a major illness, a recent death, or some other family crisis.

However, if your child is learning how to use the toilet without problems, there is no need to stop because of these situations.



## Toilet Training Tips

- **Decide which words to use.** Choose the words your family will use to describe body parts, urine, and bowel movements. Remember that other people will hear these words too, so pick words that will not offend, confuse, or embarrass anyone. Avoid negative words like "dirty," "naughty," or "stinky." They can make your child feel ashamed and embarrassed. Talk about bowel movements and urination in a simple, matter-of-fact manner.
- **Pick a potty chair.** A potty chair is easier for a small child to use because there is no problem getting onto it and a child's feet can reach the floor. Special books or toys for "potty time" may help make this more enjoyable for your child.
- **Know the signs.** Before having a bowel movement, your child may grunt or make other straining noises, squat, or stop playing for a moment. When pushing, his face may turn red. Explain to your child that these signs mean that a bowel movement is about to come. Your child may wait until after the fact to tell you about a wet diaper or a bowel movement. This is actually a good sign that your child is starting to recognize these body functions. Praise your child for telling you, and suggest that "next time" he let you know in advance. Keep in mind that it often takes longer for a child to recognize the need to urinate than the need to move bowels.
- **Make trips to the potty routine.** When your child seems ready to urinate or have a bowel movement, go to the potty. It may also be helpful to make trips to the potty a regular part of your child's daily routine, such as first thing in the morning, after meals, or before naps.
- **Try training pants.** Once your child starts using the potty with some success, training pants can be used. This moment will be special. Your child will feel proud of this sign of growing up. However, be prepared for "accidents."

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.

