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Toilet Training Your Child

When should I start toilet training my child?

Do not start toilet training until both you and your child are ready. You are ready when you are able to devote the time and energy necessary to encourage your child on a daily.

Signs that your child is ready include the following:

- Your child signals that his or her diaper is wet or soiled.
- Your child seems interested in the potty chair or toilet.
- Your child says that he or she would like to go to the potty.
- Your child understands and follows basic instructions.
- Your child feels uncomfortable if his or her diaper is wet or soiled.
- Your child stays dry for periods of 2 hours or longer during the day.
- Your child wakes up from naps with a dry diaper.
- Your child can pull his or her pants down and then up again.

You may start noticing these signs when your child is 18 to 24 months of age. However, it is not uncommon for a child to still be in diapers at 2 and a half to 3 years of age.

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How should I prepare my child for toilet training?

Allow your child to be present when you go to the bathroom and make your child feel comfortable in the bathroom. Allow your child to see urine and bowel movements in the toilet. Let your child practice flushing the toilet.

Before toilet training your child, place a potty chair in your child's normal living and play area so that your child will become familiar with the potty. Consider placing a potty chair on each floor of the house if you live in a multilevel home. Allow your child to observe, touch and become familiar with the potty chair.

Tell your child that the potty chair is his or her own chair. Allow your child to sit fully clothed on the potty chair, as if it were a regular chair. Allow your child to leave the potty chair at any time. Do not force your child to spend time sitting on the chair.

After your child has become used to the potty chair and sits on it regularly with his or her clothes on, try having your child sit on the potty without wearing pants and a diaper. Let your child become comfortable with sitting on the potty without wearing pants and a diaper.

The next step is to show your child how the potty chair is used. Place stool from a dirty diaper into the

potty chair. Allow your child to observe the transfer of the bowel movement from the potty chair into the toilet. Let your child flush the toilet and watch the bowel movement disappear down the toilet.

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How do I teach my child to use the toilet?

After your child has become comfortable with flushing the toilet and sitting on the potty chair, you may begin teaching your child to go to the bathroom. Keep your child in loose, easily removable pants.

Place your child on the potty chair whenever he or she signals the need to go to the bathroom. Your child's facial expression may change when he or she feels the need to urinate or to have a bowel movement. Your child may stop any activity he or she is engaged in when he or she feels the need to go to the bathroom.

Most children have a bowel movement once a day, usually within an hour after eating. Most children urinate within an hour after having a large drink.

In addition to watching for signals that your child needs to urinate or have a bowel movement, place your child on the potty at regular intervals. This may be as often as every 1 and a half to 2 hours.

Stay with your child when he or she is on the potty chair. Reading or talking to your child when he or she is sitting on the potty may help your child relax. Praise your child when he or she goes to the bathroom in the potty chair, but do not express disappointment if your child does not urinate or have a bowel movement in the potty. Be patient with your child.

Once your child has learned to use the potty chair, your child can begin using an over-the-toilet seat and a step-up stool.

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What about training pants?

Doctors disagree about whether to use disposable training pants. Some think that training pants may confuse children and make them think it is okay to use them like diapers. This may slow the toilet training process. Others think training pants may be a helpful step when you are training your child. Sometimes, training pants are used at nighttime, when it is more difficult for a child to control his or her bladder.

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What if my child has an accident?

Your child may have an occasional accident even after he or she learns how to use the toilet. Sometimes, children get too involved in activities and forget that they need to use the bathroom. Suggesting regular trips to the bathroom may help prevent some accidents.

If your child does have an accident, stay calm. Do not punish your child. Simply change your child and continue to encourage your child to use the potty chair.

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How long will it take to toilet train my child?

Every child is different. It may take as long as 3 to 6 months for your child to be toilet trained during daytime. It may take longer to teach your child to use the toilet during nighttime when his or her bladder control is reduced. It is important for you to be patient and supportive. If after a few months, your child is still resisting or having difficulties with toilet training, talk to your family doctor. The most likely reason your child has not learned to use the potty is that your child is not yet ready for toilet training.

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Other Organizations

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