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## What is digital stimulation?

Digital stimulation is a way to help your child have a bowel movement (stool). It is also called dig stim. Dig stim is often used after a spinal cord injury or other problem that affects the spinal cord.

After a spinal cord injury:

- Messages cannot be sent between the brain and the rectum (the lower part of the colon). These messages are sent through nerves that do not work.
- The brain does not get the message that the rectum is full and that it is time to use the bathroom.
- The muscles in the rectum may not be able to open and close like normal. This means that a normal bowel movement is not possible.

**SAFETY NOTE:** If your child has a spinal cord injury **above the T6 level:**

- Dig stim can cause a severe problem called autonomic dysreflexia, also called hyperreflexia. It can be life-threatening.
- You should know the signs and treatment of this **before** you start dig stim. Ask your care team for the Autonomic Dysreflexia teaching sheet.

## What supplies do I need?

You will need:

- Disposable gloves or finger covers
- Towel or pad
- Toilet paper
- Water soluble lubricant, such as KY jelly or Surgilube
- Wash cloth or paper towels
- Soap and water
- Dil stick, if needed

## What are the steps to dig stim?

Steps for dig stim include:

1. Wash your hands well with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds. Make sure your nails are clean and cut short.
2. Have your child sit on the toilet, bedside commode or a special toilet seat. If your child must stay in bed, have them lie curled on their left side.
3. Put on your glove or finger cover. You may want to wear two layers.
4. Smear the lubricant over your finger or dil stick. Do not use petroleum jelly (Vaseline).

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

## Digital stimulation, continued

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5. Gently insert your finger or dil stick into the rectum just past the circle of muscle that keeps it closed. This muscle is called the anal sphincter.
6. Move your finger or dil stick in gentle circles until the muscle relaxes and stool appears. Let the stool empty from the rectum. This may take 1 to 3 minutes.
7. Check with your child's doctor about how long dig stim should take. Ask how many times to repeat it for your child.
8. Wash your child's skin with warm, soapy water. If you used a dil stick, wash it in warm, soapy water.
9. Dispose of your glove or finger cover. Wash your hands well again.

Your child can learn to do dig stim them self if they are old enough and can reach their rectum.

### What else can I do if my child does not pass stool?

- Have your child "bear down" gently and cough, grunt or breathe deeply.
- Rub the stomach area from right to left and down your child's left side.
- Use a suppository if your child's doctor tells you to.
- Remove stool by hand if your child's doctor tells you to.

### What is a suppository?

A suppository is medicine you put into the rectum. It helps your child have a bowel movement.

- Ask your child's doctor if it is okay to try a suppository.
- Keep the suppository in the refrigerator. Let it come to room temperature before you use it.
- Remove the foil wrap. Put a small amount of water-soluble lubricant on the suppository before you use it.

### What is manual removal of stool?

Manual removal of stool is a way to gently remove stool from the rectum with your hand. You may need to do this if stool is packed too tightly in their rectum. Ask your child's doctor about using manual removal with your child **before** you do it.

### How can I help my child have regular bowel movements?

Start a good bowel program for your child so that they have regular bowel movements. Some guidelines for a bowel program include

- Do dig stim as your doctor directs. Most often, this is 1 time a day or 1 time every other day.
- Do dig stim at the same time each day to train the bowels to empty regularly.
- Do dig stim about 30 minutes after a meal or feeding. This helps move the stool along the intestines and into the rectum.

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# Digital stimulation, continued

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- Have your child use a toilet or bedside commode if possible. Sitting up helps gravity move the stool into the rectum. Avoid using bedpans.
- Have your child eat a diet with fiber and fluids, as advised by their doctor. This helps to keep the stool soft and well-formed.
- Keep your child as active as possible. This helps the intestines work well.

## When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if your child:

- Is not able to have a bowel movement for more than 2 to 3 days.
- Has harder or looser stools.
- Has more gas than normal.
- Has leaking or accidents between dig stim sessions.
- Has bleeding from the rectum.

**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

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