

Helping your child get a diagnosis if they have gut problems

If your child has gut problems or problems with their poo, then it's important that they get the right diagnosis. A GP can help with this. They may suggest that your child has some examinations or investigations. The information below can help you understand the questions the GP may ask or the investigations they may recommend.

Symptoms your child may have:

- Changes in how they poo, including:
 - How often they go
 - How urgently they need to go
 - If they have accidents
 - If they often strain when pooing
 - Changes to the colour or consistency of their poo
- Growth issues or delayed puberty
- Stomach pain, cramps, feeling bloated, excessive wind
- Mucus in their poo or their poo looks greasy
- Weight loss

These symptoms may sometimes be accompanied by:

- Bleeding from their bottom or blood in their poo
- Not wanting to eat as much
- Feeling sick or being sick
- Feeling worse when eating
- Mouth ulcers
- Feeling extremely tired



The GP will ask how long your child has had symptoms

If it's been less than two weeks, the GP may think about possible causes, such as:

- Recent travel
- Changes in diet
- Medicines your child may take
- Infections
- Symptoms during their period



The GP may ask themselves “Could it be inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)?”

What is it?: IBD is a group of conditions that include Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. In these conditions, the immune system is overactive, damaging the gut lining. This causes inflammation and ulcers.

Possible signs: Diarrhoea, tummy pain, bleeding from the bottom and weight loss. Children with IBD may also have some of the signs listed in the 'symptoms your child may have' box. Other symptoms might include looking pale, pain or problems around their bottom, needing to poo at night, fever, or problems with their skin, joints or eyes.

Risk groups: Uncommon in pre-school children. Family history can increase the risk.

The GP may ask themselves “Could it be coeliac disease?”

What is it?: Coeliac disease is an autoimmune condition. When someone with coeliac disease eats gluten, their immune system reacts and damages the gut, causing symptoms and the body can't properly absorb nutrients.

Possible signs: Symptoms may not be very specific. Children with coeliac disease may have some of the signs in the 'symptoms your child may have' box. Other symptoms might include looking pale, tooth enamel problems, problems that might include issues with coordination or numbness and tingling in the hands and feet.

Risk groups: It is more likely if there is a family history of coeliac disease, if a person has Down's or Turner syndromes or has other autoimmune conditions.

The GP may consider other conditions, such as:

- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- Other uncommon gut issues
- Constipation/overflow diarrhoea
- Food intolerances/allergies

After discussing their symptoms and examining your child, the GP will decide which investigations may be appropriate.

Possible tests the GP may suggest

Blood tests

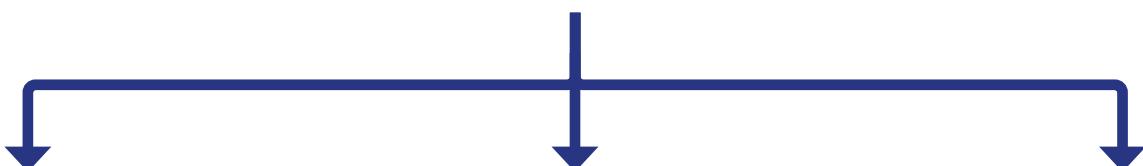
These may check for:

- How healthy your child's blood is and how much iron it contains
- Infection
- Inflammation
- Coeliac disease screening – your child should carry on eating foods that contain gluten. Cutting it out or reducing it before a test may affect their results
- How well your child's thyroid, kidneys and liver are working

Poo (stool) tests

These may check for:

- Infections
- Inflammation (called a faecal calprotectin test)



Test results for inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)?

The GP will look for signs of inflammation and blood in your child's poo. If their results show that they have inflammation they may be referred to a specialist and may need further tests. If the results are negative the GP may repeat the tests.

Coeliac screening results

If coeliac screening results are positive, the GP will refer your child to a specialist to confirm a diagnosis. Your child should continue eating gluten until they receive a diagnosis. If they do have coeliac disease, they will need to begin a gluten-free diet and should have support from a dietitian.

The GP may investigate other conditions

If Coeliac disease and IBD have been considered, your GP may think about whether it could be another common gut condition. See also the 'other actions the GP may take' box.

Other actions the GP may take

The GP may refer your child to a specialist if:

- Their tests are negative, and symptoms carry on despite treatment
- They are concerned about your child's symptoms. In some cases, your child may be referred urgently
- They think your child may have other health issues

Depending on your child's symptoms, the GP may:

- Redo some of the tests to check the results are correct

For more information, visit www.whatsupwithmygut.org.uk



Royal College of
General Practitioners