

# ONE STEP AT A TIME

The Expert Toilet Training Guide



Continence  
Foundation  
of Australia

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## TOILET TRAINING: A STEP TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

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Being able to go to the toilet on one's own is an important life skill. It is more than simply going to the toilet without the help of another person; it is also about having personal control.

### How control of wee and poo develops

At birth our bodies pass wee and poo automatically. We don't make a conscious decision about doing this. Gradually, between the ages of two and three years, we gain control over wee and poo. This is the sequence of what usually happens:

- no poo in the night nappy
- control of poo when awake
- control of wee when awake – longer time between wees
- control of wee when asleep.

This sequence is only a guide as each child varies. Don't worry if your child's control develops in a different sequence.

### Are you and your child ready?

Family and friends often give you a lot of advice about toilet training. They are well meaning but all children are different. Don't feel pressured into something you or your child are not ready to do. Toilet training takes time and effort. Take into account:

- What's happening in your life – have any major changes just occurred, such as a new baby, moving house, going overseas for an extended holiday?
- Are you able to organise support from family and friends so you can lean on them if you need to?
- Does your child show interest in watching others go to the toilet?
- Does your child tell you when they're doing a poo or a wee as they do it, or can tell you straight after?
- Does your child try to take off their nappy after a poo?



## STEP 1: SETTING THE SCENE

Begin this step by the time your child is 2 years old. This first step is mainly about making changes that start you and your child on the path to toilet training.

Skills introduced and developed in this step:

- Establishing healthy habits
- Getting familiar with the toilet
- Understanding wet and dry
- Deciding and using the words for wee and poo

### Food Fluid and Fun

*Fluids - remember WATER!*

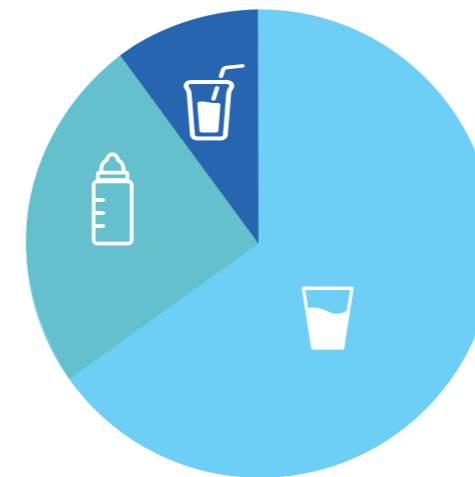
#### Water

- is important for every system in the body
- is needed to control body temperature (by perspiration)
- is needed to digest and absorb food
- helps in getting rid of waste (poo and wee).

Suggestions for encouraging your child to drink water:

- Drink water with or in front of your child so they see you enjoying it.
- Some children prefer chilled water; others like it warmed.
- Buy a novelty type of water bottle for you and your child. Take them with you when you go out.
- Add different-shaped ice cubes or ice cubes with fruit frozen inside.

Children who have a good daily water intake will produce good amounts of wee and their poo will be soft so they are less likely to become constipated. Constipation not only affects the passing of poo but can lead to tummy discomfort and loss of appetite.



 Fizzy

 Milk

 Water



## Family foods

Aim to offer different breads and cereal products every day, and choose wholemeal where possible. The following are examples of cereal and grain products your child may enjoy:

- sliced bread, bread rolls
- bagels
- pita bread, chapatti
- toasted crumpets, muffins
- scones, pikelets
- porridge oats, ready-to-eat breakfast cereals, muesli products
- crackers, crispbreads, breadsticks (grissini)
- pasta, rice.

Fruit and vegetables contain many nutrients as well as fibre. They are usually a good source of water, which may make up about 70-95% of the fruit or vegetable, depending on the variety and method of preparation (raw, cooked, canned).

Children may be encouraged to eat small servings throughout the day as part of their meals and snacks.

## An example of a balanced diet:

Breakfast	Cooked porridge
Morning Tea	Banana/slices of watermelon
Lunch	Wholemeal sandwich
Afternoon Tea	Cheese and biscuits
Dinner	Pasta with meat and vegies
Dessert	Custard

*Note: Processed fruit products such as fruit sticks, fruit bars, fruit leathers or roll ups are generally not suitable choices for fruit because they contain high amounts of sugars. These foods are dried so do not provide any fluid.*

*Remember - do not give whole or chopped nuts to young children as they can be inhaled, causing choking.*



**Activity**

Regular physical activity is an important factor for everyone in keeping their bowels healthy. Even gentle exercise, such as walking can be helpful in stimulating the abdominal muscles and the bowel.

**Constipation**

Constipation is a common childhood problem. A child who is constipated may have a poor appetite and may complain of tummy pains. If your child experiences any of the following, seek assistance from your preferred health care provider;

- hard poo - rabbit droppings or large dried poo
- pain when doing a poo - your child may make a straining sound or pull faces
- lots of little bits of poo over the day and may have a more offensive smell.

**Getting into a different routine with nappy changing**

Try to change your child in or near the toilet/bathroom so they begin to connect wee and poo with the toilet. Where possible, change your child in the standing position as this helps make them aware of a different routine. Change the nappy quickly without play.

**Some decisions to make before you start: potty v toilet**

We recommend that you start where you intend to finish – your child using the toilet. By starting with the toilet and not the potty you have made it easier for your child as they don't have to learn to use the potty and then learn to use the toilet. Make sure you have the right equipment for your child to be safe and feel safe on the toilet.

Listed in the table below are the advantages and disadvantages of both to help you make your decision.

Potty	Toilet
A potty is small, easy to use, non-threatening and comes in bright designs.	You are simplifying the learning process for your child.
A potty promotes independence, as a child may be able to use it without help.	There is no transition to another piece of equipment.
If you forget it when you go out, your child may have to use a toilet anyway, which may be confusing.	A toilet can simply be flushed, but a potty must be cleaned after each use.
Toilets are everywhere but a potty has to be taken on outings.	

**Using the words wee and poo**

Decide on the words you and your family will use for wee and poo. It is important that everyone – child care, school, family and friends – uses the same words so your child does not get confused with different words meaning the same thing. These are the words your child will themselves use later on when asking to go to the toilet.



## STEP 2: DEVELOPING THE SKILLS NEEDED

A child needs to have a number of skills before they can use the toilet on their own – it's not just about being able to do wee or poo in the right place.

Skills introduced and developed in this step:

- Sitting on the toilet
- Pulling pants down and up
- Sequence of steps when going to and using the toilet

### The toilet area

The toilet area needs to be an inviting place where your child feels safe and relaxed, and is happy to go.

#### MAKING THE AREA INVITING

- Decorate the walls with posters, wall charts or a sticker chart with your child's photo.
- Ensure the toilet area is warm.
- Place a warm, colourful mat on the floor.
- Choose toilet paper which is soft, has pictures, or is coloured.
- Use soap, room sprays/deodorisers or disinfectants that your child finds pleasant smelling.

#### MAKING THE AREA SAFE

- Have an open-door policy so your child sees other family members use the toilet as part of their normal routine.
- If the fan and light are on the one switch and your child is upset by the noise of the fan, you may need to use a small portable light.
- Stay nearby when your child is sitting on the toilet.
- Use suitable equipment for your child's needs. Such items can include: a toilet seat insert to make the hole smaller; a footstool which helps them balance; and a padded toilet seat for comfort which may help your child feel safer.

#### MAKING THE AREA RELAXING

- Place a favourite toy or teddy or doll on a toy potty in the room.
- Talk or sing or play games with your child.
- Read a book about toileting to your child.
- Play music which makes them relax or feel happy.
- Blow bubbles together while your child sits and relaxes.

### Dressing and undressing

Learning to dress and undress involves several skills. Here are some tips to help your child learn to pull their pants down and up.

- Use loose, comfortable clothes. Your child might do best with shorts, pyjama pants or track pants with an elastic waist.
- Use clothing that is easy to pull up and down.
- Once your child is able to push down their pants get them to practise pulling up their pants using the same steps.



**Toilet position**

Sitting on the toilet in the right position is important to make sure your child empties out all their wee and poo.

- Your child’s bottom should be touching the back part of the toilet seat.
- Feet should be flat on the foot stool and not hanging down in mid-air as your child may find it more difficult to do poo.
- The step height will depend on your child and your toilet.
- Make sure your child’s feet and legs are apart when they are sitting.
- Have your child lean forward with a straight back. This means they bend from the hips.
- Use an insert ring to provide additional reassurance that they won’t fall in.
- If it doesn’t work the first time have a rest and try again.

**Sitting on the toilet**

If you haven’t done so yet, get the equipment you will need to ensure your child is able to sit on the toilet feeling safe - insert ring, footstool, steps or potty chair. Most children need to practise sitting on the toilet because it is a new routine and a different kind of seat. The aim is to get your child used to sitting on the toilet and being happy to sit there for up to two minutes.

**Sitting**

Gradually increase the number of times and the length of time your child sits on the toilet.

Two minutes is the sitting-time goal; five minutes at the absolute maximum!

Once they are sitting without complaint try adding another time – first nappy change of the day is a good one.

Increase the sitting frequency e.g. after each meal.

Some children will not sit with a bare bottom. Start them sitting with their clothes on; they may also need the lid shut. Gradually move to lid open, pants down, and bare bottom.

*Note: Never force your child to sit on the toilet. Do not allow them to be distressed. If they are upset or refuse to sit, stop, walk away and try again later.*

**How to use rewards and praise**

Rewards are used to engage your child in developing toileting skills.

Feedback is very important in learning new skills. By giving a reward you are telling your child that they have performed the skill correctly. A reward can:

- help motivate your child to cooperate and repeat the skill.
- increase the chances of the skill being repeated.

The following points need to be kept in mind in relation to rewards:

- Choose something your child likes that is quick, easy to give and low cost or no cost.
- Praise when your child tries hard or does well.
- Give rewards immediately, do not wait.
- Combine rewards with praise so your child knows what behaviour or skill is being rewarded.
- Keep the reward specifically for the toileting skill so your child doesn’t get confused about why they are getting the reward.
- Ensure everyone who is involved in the toilet training process knows what rewards are being given.
- Gradually fade out the rewards as your child masters the skill you are teaching.

**Just for boys: sitting or standing to wee**

We recommend that you start with sitting to wee to avoid confusion with poo. Only teach your son to stand once he is reliable with going to the toilet for wee and poo.

**Sitting vs standing for boys**

Sitting	Standing
Helps keep the training process simple when starting.	No transition from sitting to standing but some boys refuse to sit on the toilet for poo.
Your son is sitting for both wee and poo.	Can be difficult for smaller boys to reach the toilet.
It is easier to get the wee into the toilet and less messy.	Many boys learn to wee standing up without ever being taught.





## STEP 3: RAISING AWARENESS

**Skill introduced and developed in this step**  
— Increased awareness of the sensation of passing wee and poo

### Raising awareness about wee and poo

#### BEFORE YOU START

Before you move your child into underpants to start the training process you need to have decided on the following:

- A plan for dealing with wee and poo accidents – see below for some suggestions.
- **Trainer pants.**
- Rewards – what and how you will use them.

You may need to purchase extra underwear and clothing such as leggings, tracksuit pants, shorts with elastic waist as your child may go through several pairs a day when you first start. Talk to everyone involved about when your child moves into underpants – child care, kinder, family and friends to make sure all are on the same page.

#### SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO DEAL WITH ACCIDENTS

- Accidents are part of the learning process – we learn by our mistakes.
- Be careful that you give your child the right response so they can learn.
- Only reward the behaviour you want.

*Remember to never get angry at your child when they have an accident even though you may be getting frustrated. Anger and frustration risk further setbacks in your child's toilet training journey. The key is to praise the behaviour you want and ignore the behaviour you don't, and if toilet training becomes too stressful due to lack of progress and too many accidents take a break.*

Make up an 'accident pack' containing wipes, underwear, spare clothes and rubbish bag and keep it in or close to the toilet. Collect the pack before taking your child to the toilet so you can complete the clean-up with a minimum of fuss and conversation.

To move to Step 4:

- Your child should be passing good amounts of wee rather than just dribbles
- Your child's poo should be soft formed and easily passed.
- There should be no constipation.

### Goal setting

To help your child learn new skills you need to be clear as to what you want your child to be able to do. The goal you and your child are working towards is being able to use the toilet without help.

#### WHAT IS A GOAL?

A goal is the action or behaviour you want your child to do. For example:

- My child will let me know they need to go to the toilet by using the word 'toilet'.
- My child will be able to pull up their underwear.
- My child will be able to sit on the toilet for thirty seconds.

### HOW TO USE THE GOAL

On the following page list the actions that will help your child learn the behaviour you want. For example:

Goal - My child will let me know when they need to go to the toilet by using the word 'toilet'.

#### Actions

- Each time I take my child to the toilet I will say the word 'toilet' (or the person taking my child to the toilet will say this).
- I will ask my child to say the word 'toilet' or use the picture/sign for 'toilet' when I point to the toilet.
- I will point out the toilet in a story book when reading with my child.

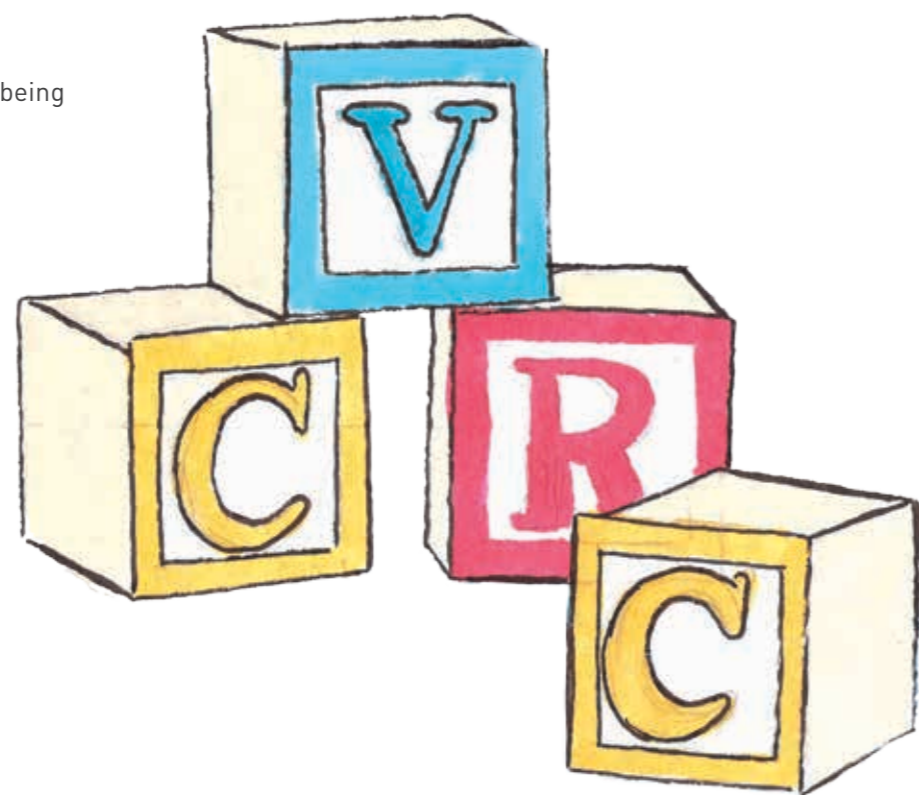
Reward your child when they do the action you are teaching and ignore any negative behaviour. For example: When my child uses the word 'toilet' correctly the reward will be: 'Well done, that's the toilet!' See page 15 in the booklet for more information about rewards.

### WRITING A PLAN

The purpose of the plan is to make sure that everyone involved in helping your child with developing toilet skills has a consistent approach.

#### A plan

- should include the goal and the actions to be used to teach the behaviour in the goal.
- doesn't need to be anything too complicated.
- everyone will make clear what is being taught, how it is being taught and the rewards that are to be used.
- Will give certainty to your child and help prevent confusion.



## STEP 3: RAISING AWARENESS



Child's name .....

Date .....

Goal .....

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Reward .....

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Learning actions .....

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The purpose of the plan is to make sure that everyone involved in helping your child with developing toilet skills has a consistent approach.

We are now at the nitty-gritty of toilet training – the expectation of wee and poo happening in the toilet.



## STEP 4: USING THE TOILET FOR WEE AND POO

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Skills introduced and developed in this step:

- Using the toilet for wee and poo
- Putting together the toileting steps
- Learning to use unfamiliar toilets

**THE SUPPORTING SKILLS HAVE BEEN PRACTISED SO YOUR CHILD SHOULD BE WELL ON THE WAY TO:**

- cooperating when asked to go to the toilet
- sitting happily on the toilet
- making attempts to pull down and pull up their clothes and underwear.

**GETTING STARTED WITH USING THE TOILET FOR WEE AND POO**

- Pick a time when you can be around your home for two or three days to focus on the toilet training.
- If this is not possible, be sure to let child care know that you have started toilet training and that your child will not be in nappies.
- Remove day nappy.
- Use underwear or cloth trainer pants.
- Use nappies only at night.
- In these first few days give your child big drinks to increase the likelihood of them doing wee in the toilet. Wait 10–15 minutes after a big drink then try your child on the toilet.
- When you take your child to the toilet remind them of the steps.
- Assist where necessary.
- When wee or poo is passed into the toilet make a big fuss with praise and rewards to show how pleased you are and to reinforce the skill.
- Remember to also praise cooperation.

By now you will have a good idea of how often your child is doing wee and poo so you can begin the training process.

**KEEPING ON TRACK**

- After these few days of ‘intensive’ training you will have established a routine of taking your child to the toilet following drinks and food.
- This means your child will be sitting on the toilet after breakfast, morning snack, lunch, afternoon snack, dinner or tea, and before bed, in all five or six times each day.
- Keep to the routine both at home and when on outings. Try not to put a nappy on your child. If you are going out and are not certain about the toileting facilities put the nappy over the underpants.
- Keep the toilet time focused. Remember it should be fun but not entertaining. You want your child to focus on using the toilet not on how long you are willing to read stories, sing songs or play.
- Keep a record of success in toileting and of ‘accidents’. It will help you track the progress your child is making.
- As your child becomes more reliable with using the toilet fade out the prompting and encourage them to ask or tell you when they need to go to the toilet. This may take several months especially with poo.

## Sitting for wee but nothing happens

Your child may be happy to sit on the toilet but does not wee into the toilet. Soon after getting off the toilet they may wet their pants.

There are several reasons why this may happen. Your child:

- has toilet times that don't match their pattern
- has an inconsistent toileting routine
- may not understand the feeling of needing to do wee
- may have poor understanding of what they are meant to do on the toilet
- may be anxious or fearful about sitting on the toilet.

### WHAT YOU CAN TRY

- Plan toilet times after meals, sleep or exercise.
- Give your child a big drink 10-15 minutes before toilet time to increase the likelihood of your child doing wee. This will also help your child learn the feeling of 'fullness'.
- Establish a regular toileting routine and times so your child has several opportunities each day to practise and learn what is expected.
- To help your child 'let go', try pouring water from one jug to another, have your child blow bubbles, or play the sound of running water
- Make sure your child feels safe on the toilet and is able to sit in the correct toilet position. The correct toilet position is particularly important for doing poo.
- Make sure your child is interested in the reward they are being given.
- Make sure that you are calm and give only limited attention when you are cleaning up an accident and changing your child into clean clothes.
- Having used these suggestions, if there is no progress you may need to take a break from toilet training. But it is important to keep to consistent routines to help your child maintain skills they have learnt and for them to practise dressing and undressing.

## WON'T SIT FOR POO

Your child may be happy to sit on the toilet and do a wee but refuse point blank to sit to do a poo. They may ask for a nappy, or hold on for days if the nappy is not given; do poo in their pants; or wait until they are in their night nappy to poo. Parents often find these situations difficult to deal with and feel their child is never going to get out of nappies.

Be reassured that issues with poo are common. Here are some ideas you can try to help your child move to doing poo in the toilet.

### WHY THIS MAY BE HAPPENING FOR YOUR CHILD

There are several reasons why your child may not be doing poo in the toilet. The child may:

- have poor understanding of what they are meant to do on the toilet.
- be anxious or fearful about sitting on the toilet.
- fear 'letting go' of poo. This can be a very real fear for children. It is not well understood but seems to have a lot to do with poo being solid and the child seeing it as part of themselves being flushed down the toilet.
- need to know you can see they are frightened but help them to understand that the poo is 'happy' to go into the toilet: it's only rubbish the body is getting rid of.
- have learnt to poo standing and does not want or know how to poo sitting on the toilet.
- be constipated or have difficulty in passing poo.
- not like the smell of their poo.
- be constipated seek assistance from your preferred health professional.

## Not moving forward may be moving backwards

Your child has been making real progress with toilet training when suddenly it all stops! Instead of moving forward they are going backwards. The child who may have been having few accidents is now wet all the time. Frustrating and puzzling as this backward step is, it is a common occurrence, known as regression. Let's look at some of the reasons for regression and how you can get your child back on track with toileting.

### SOME REASONS FOR REGRESSION

- Rewards and praise for keeping dry and clean may have been removed too quickly.
- Accidents with wee and poo are getting a lot of attention. Your child repeats this behaviour because it gets your attention.
- Change in the family routine - a new baby, moving house, going on holiday, change in child care arrangements, new bed, or starting school can throw your child out of the good routines you have established.
- An episode of constipation resulting in passing a painful poo can make your child refuse to use the toilet.
- The child has had an illness or infection, especially a urinary tract infection.
- Having a 'bad' experience in the toilet is causing your child to become fearful of using the toilet.
- There has been a change in diet or medications.

If you are experiencing regression and need further assistance please seek further help or assistance from your preferred health professional.



## STEP 5: NIGHT TIME CONTROL

### Skills introduced and developed in this step — Staying dry when asleep

#### ABOUT NIGHT TIME BLADDER CONTROL

To stay dry overnight we need to develop the skill of responding to our bladder when asleep. We either need to wake up to go to the toilet or hold on, a complex interaction between our body and our brain. When we are asleep the body continues to make wee so the bladder is filling and sending messages to the brain about how full it is. The brain must respond by either keeping the bladder holding on or waking us up to go to the toilet. If the brain does not respond to the bladder's messages the bladder empties when it is full. Most of us develop night control without having to do anything special.

#### TIPS FOR NIGHT TIME CONTROL

Wait until your child has reliable day time control before moving on to night time control. It takes at least six months for children to be reliable during the day. Your child may tell you they are ready either by not wanting to wear a nappy or taking it off. Many children will wake up dry but use the nappy because they are wearing it.

- Get a waterproof mattress protector or an absorbent bed pad.
- Don't restrict fluids in the evening but make sure your child is not over-drinking before going to bed. Their last drink should be about an hour before going to bed. If you are in the habit of giving a night bottle you will need to wean your child off it.
- Take your child to the toilet just before they go to bed.

- Leave a night light on.

- Don't wake your child to take them to the toilet during the night as they often have no memory of this in the morning. Waking them doesn't help them learn to wake up to the feeling of needing to do wee.
- Keep a record of what happens each night – dry or wet.
- Use rewards for specific things you want your child to do, for example: going to the toilet before bed, helping to strip the bed, putting wet clothes into the laundry.

#### HOW LONG SHOULD YOU KEEP GOING?







Try these tips for a couple of weeks. If there are more dry beds than wet, keep going; if there are more wet beds than dry it may be too early for your child.

#### ABOUT BEDWETTING

Bedwetting, sometimes called nocturnal enuresis, is when a child over six years old is unable to stay dry overnight. Treatment is usually offered to children over the age of six.

THE BRISTOL STOOL FORM SCALE (for children)

# Choose your Poo!

type 1		looks like <b>rabbit droppings</b> Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
type 2		looks like <b>bunch of grapes</b> Sausage-shaped but lumpy
type 3		looks like <b>corn on the cob</b> Like a sausage, but with cracks on the surface
type 4		looks like <b>sausage</b> Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
type 5		looks like <b>chicken nuggets</b> Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (passed easily)
type 6		looks like <b>porridge</b> Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (passed easily)
type 7		looks like <b>gravy</b> Watery, no solid pieces ENTIRELY LIQUID

The concept by Professor DCA Candy and Emma Davey, based on the Bristol Stool Form Scale produced by Dr KW Heaton, Reader in Medicine at the University of Bristol. © 2005 Norgine Limited manufacturer of MOVICOL®-Half



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