

Constipation

Your child has been diagnosed with constipation and may have any of the following symptoms:

- Three or more days without passing a stool (with the exception of breastfed infants over 1 month of age)
- Cannot pass a stool or is having pain or crying while passing a stool
- Straining or pushing for longer than 10 minutes and cannot pass a stool
- Mild, intermittent abdominal pain
- **CAUTION:** There are many “imitators” of constipation including: straining in babies (can be normal in infants, especially if they are continuing to pass normal size stools daily), large stools, hard or dry stools, brief straining, and stools every 4-7 days in breastfed infants over 1 month of age. If you are unsure whether or not your child meets the criteria for constipation, please contact our office to schedule an appointment with one of our providers.

Causes & Course of Constipation

- Constipation can be caused by many factors, including low fiber diets, high milk diets, low fluid intake, stool withholding due to pain, stool withholding due to power struggles or toilet training, or slow passage of food through intestines (“slow transit time”).
- The normal range for stools can be from 3 stools per day to 1 stool every 2 days.
- Constipation is common in children and is most often caused by a change in diet.

Care & Treatment of Constipation

- 1) Diet for Infants <12 Months Old:
 - May add 1 oz of fruit juice (prune, pear, or apple) per month of age per day (e.g., a 3 month-old child could have up to 3 ounces of fruit juice per day). Limit to no more than 4 oz per day.
 - Juice should be given undiluted and separately from feedings of breastmilk or formula.
 - If >4-6 months of age, may also offer solid foods (purees or table foods, depending on infant's age and texture tolerance) that are high in fiber (e.g., prunes, pears, peaches, plums, peas, beans, apricots).
- 2) Diet for Children >1 Year Old:
 - Offer fruit juice (apple, pear, cherry, grape, prune), but limit to no more than 4-6 oz per day.
 - Citrus fruit juices are not as helpful for constipation.
 - Add fruits and vegetables high in fiber content 3 times or more per day.
 - Increase intake of whole grains (oatmeal, brown rice, whole wheat, bran).
 - Limit intake of dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt) to 3 servings per day.
- 3) Positional Changes:
 - Putting your child in a flexed position can help release stool.
 - Bringing knees to chest helps create a squat which is the natural way to push out stool.
 - Gentle massage of the lower abdomen can also be helpful.
 - Putting your child in a warm tub of water can help relax the anus to allow for easier passage of stool.
- 4) Stool Softeners for Children >1 Year Old:
 - For chronic or recurrent constipation, use MiraLax until patient is seen by a provider.
 - Miralax is a colorless, tasteless and odorless powder that can be mixed with any liquid
 - For ages 1-5: Mix 1 teaspoon with 2 ounces of liquid per day

- For ages 6-12: Mix 2 teaspoons with 4 ounces of liquid per day
- For ages 13 and older: Mix 3 teaspoons with 6 ounces of liquid per day
- Fiber supplements (such as Benefiber) can also be helpful. Give 1 teaspoon twice a day.
- Stool softeners and fiber supplements usually take 8-12 hours to work.

What to Expect with Constipation

- Improvements in the diet usually relieve constipation.
- After constipation resolves, be sure to keep your child on a high fiber, non-constipating diet so that it does not return.
- Call our office and make an appointment if the constipation continues after making dietary changes.

Return to School/Daycare with Constipation

- Constipation is not contagious. If your child is feeling well enough to participate in activities, they can return to school.

When to Call for Constipation

Continue Self-Care at Home

- Mild constipation; well-managed on current treatment plan

Call Office to be Seen Within 24 Hours

- Leaking stool
- Suppository or enema was needed to get stool out OR was given and did not work
- Age <2 months and is meeting criteria for true constipation
- Infrequent stools not improved with dietary changes
- Stool softeners are being used and have not yet been discussed with your child's provider
- Painful stools not improved with dietary changes
- Stool withholding: child needs to pass a stool but is afraid or refuses to let it out
- Children may be "blocked up"

Call Office to be Seen Urgently or Contact Emergency On-Call Provider

- Abdominal or rectal pain for >1 hour (includes crying) related to constipation
- Vomits 2 or more times and stomach looks more swollen than normal
- Age <1 month old and breastfed and is meeting criteria for true constipation
- Age <12 months old with recent onset of weak suck or weak muscles

Call 911 Now

- Child is not moving or can't wake up
- Severe trouble breathing (struggling for breath and cannot speak or cry)
- Child is faint or too weak to stand
- You think your child has a life threatening emergency