

CONSTIPATION

- 1. Definition:** A child is constipated if stools are hard and painful. Therefore, large BM's are not necessarily constipation and some grunting/straining can be normal. Also having a bowel movement is a normal developmental process for a baby and some straining a normal part of that process. Going four or more days without a bowel movement is also considered constipation in children but may be normal in infants. Many children normally go two or three days without a BM-if the bowel movement is soft and not painful that is okay.

Constipation is often due to some temporary change in the child's diet or exercise level. It is very common in toilet training children. It is usually easy to solve with dietary changes. After he/she is feeling better, be sure to keep him/her on a rather non-constipating diet and a regular toilet sitting schedule to prevent it from happening again.

- 2. Treatment for babies:** Give the baby strained apricots, prunes, peaches, or pears twice a day. Apple, pear, or prune juice may also help.
 - a.** If the baby has been started on solid foods (4-6 mon), some foods naturally bind: rice, cereal, applesauce and bananas. If constipation occurs with these foods, avoid them or just give loosening food with them, e.g. prunes or peaches.
 - b.** Often times babies become constipated and subsequently fuss and cry during the night. This can become very alarming to parents. In these cases when your baby is uncomfortable, lubricate a rectal thermometer and insert it into the child's rectum. This rectal stimulation often results in stooling. A warm bath is also helpful to soothe the cramps and encourage a BM.
 - c.** If the baby is older than two months, a small amount of prune or prune/apple juice can be offered. About 1-2 oz of juice mixed with 1 oz of water can be offered on a daily basis.
 - d.** If the baby is less than two months and seems to be constipated, please call the office during regular business hours.
- 3. Treatment for older children:**
 - a.** Have your child eat plenty of fruits and vegetables (raw ones are the best, and skins are also helpful). Some examples are prunes, figs, dates, raisins, peaches, pears, apricots, etc. Prune juice can be mixed 50/50 with 7-Up and tastes like Dr. Pepper. Bran is an excellent natural laxative (1-3 tsp bran mixed with applesauce or orange juice). Other suggestions include natural bran and other whole grain cereals, bran muffins, shredded wheat, graham crackers, oatmeal, brown rice, whole wheat bread, Fig Newton cookies, etc. Milk, ice cream and cheese are constipating and should be kept to minimal amounts. Also, be sure he/she drinks plenty of water.

- b. In stubborn cases, try 1 tablespoon of mineral oil mixed with cold milk, juice, applesauce, etc. one to three times a days. This usually works in two to three days and is a safe and effective way to loosen stools.
- c. If this doesn't work, two good laxatives that you can buy at your drug or grocery store without a prescription are Miralax and Senokot. It comes in liquid or powder and is best mixed with milk.

The Miralax dosage is:

Children: 1 tablespoon twice daily; (dose is adjustable)

Adolescents: 2 tablespoons twice daily.

The Senokot dosage is:

Children: age 2-6 years- $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon at bedtime;

Children: age 6-12 years- 1-1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons at bedtime;

Adolescents: 2-3 teaspoons at bedtime.

Try this for three days and then only when necessary.

- 4. **Mistakes:** Don't use any suppositories and strong medicated laxatives without calling our office. These can cause cramps and irritation.
- 5. Internet resource: www.niddk.nih.gov/health/digest/pubs/whyconst/whyconst.htm
- 6. **Call our office during regular hours if:**
 - a. The child gets cramps or pain that lasts over two hours.
 - b. If he/she goes three days on this dietary approach without a BM.
 - c. Any blood in BM's.
 - d. For any other symptom that concerns you.
- 7. **Call our office urgently if:**
 - a. Constipation is **not** an emergency and isn't a reason to visit the ER.