

Constipation

Constipation involves passing hard, dry stools, usually infrequently and often with some difficulty. The longer the stool remains in the colon, the firmer and drier it often becomes, making it even more difficult to pass without discomfort. The difficulty, and often pain, associated with passing large hard stools may often lead to more retention. Sometimes, liquid stool can even leak out around the impacted stool causing soiling in the underwear. Not surprisingly, constipation is a significant source of anxiety for the child as well as the parent. There are numerous factors associated with constipation. The following are the main pediatric causes:

- 1) Decreased fluid intake
- 2) Poor diet
 - high fat, low fiber diet
 - too much dairy
- 3) Inactive lifestyle
- 4) Poor bowel habits, for example:
 - starting toilet training too young or having inappropriate expectations can lead to anxiety and insecurity which then can lead to withholding stools
 - fear of pain or fear of using a toilet outside of the home may lead to withholding

The management of constipation often involves the resolving acute problem of impaction followed by preventative measures. Remedies to try first at home if your infant or child is having an immediate problem with impacted stool:

- Rectal stimulation for an infant
- Glycerin suppository (age-appropriate)
- Water or prune, pear or apple juice (max 6oz/day for infants <6mos)

Maintenance treatment involves:

- Increasing water intake – discuss with your doctor the appropriate amount for your child.
- Decreasing dairy intake to no more than 2-3 servings of dairy per day. This would be equivalent to 20 oz or less of milk per day or no more than 2 slices of cheese per day.
- Increasing the fiber in the diet. High fiber foods include: fruits with the letter “p” (apples, pears, prunes, apricots, plums, peaches), raisins, high-fiber vegetables (leafy vegetables, peas, beans, broccoli), whole-grain cereals, and whole-grain bread products. At the same time, cut back on foods such as rice, bananas, and cereals or breads that are not high in fiber.
- Encourage a regular toilet routine. The best time to sit on the toilet is 10-15 minutes after eating. Encourage the child to sit on the toilet for at least 10 minutes. Using a footstool can optimize the child’s position to pass a stool. And positive reinforcement is always helpful.

*** For infants under 6 months of age, since solids are not a significant part of their diet, daily water or juice (prune, pear, or apple at a maximum of 6 oz per day) may be necessary to maintain regular soft bowel movements.***

WARNING SIGNS: bloody stools, fever, vomiting, failure to gain weight, bloated or painful stomach, or constipation in the first month of life

If the above measures are not working or any of the warning signs are present, then please contact your doctor as your child may need further evaluation/management.