

## CONSTIPATION

### Definition of Constipation:

- Pain or crying during the passage of a bowel movement (BM) OR
- Unable to pass a BM after straining or pushing longer than 10 minutes OR
- No BM after more than 2 days. (EXCEPTION: If breastfed and over 1 month old.)

### Imitators of Constipation:

- If breastfed and over 1 month old: Infrequent BMs every 4-7 days that are soft, large and pain free can be normal. Before 1 month old, infrequent stools usually means an inadequate intake of breastmilk.
- Grunting or straining while pushing out a BM is normal in young infants. (Reason: difficult to pass BM lying on back with no help from gravity.) Infants commonly become red in the face during straining.
- Brief straining or pushing for less than 10 minutes can occur occasionally at any age.
- Large BMs – Size relates to amount of food consumed and BM frequency. Large eaters have larger stools.
- Hard or dry BMs are also normal if passed easily without straining. Often relates to poor fiber intake. Some children even have small, dry rabbit-like-pellet stools.

### Causes:

- High milk or cheese diet
- Low fiber diet
- Painful bowel movements
- Slow GI transit time (normal genetic differences)

## WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR FOR CONSTIPATION

### Call Your Doctor Now (night or day) if:

- Your child looks or acts very sick
- Persistent abdominal pain longer than 1 hour (includes persistent crying).
- Persistent rectal pain longer than 1 hour (includes persistent straining.)
- Vomiting more than 3 times in last 2 hours.
- Age less than 1 month old and breastfed.
- Age less than 12 months with recent onset of weak cry, weak suck, or weak muscles.

### Call Your Doctor Within 24 Hours if:

- You think your child needs to be seen.
- Age less than 2 months.
- Bleeding from anal fissures (tears).

### Call Your Doctor During Weekday Office Hours if:

- You have other questions or concerns.
- Leaking stool.
- Suppository or enema needed recently to relieve pain
- Days between BMs longer than 3 while eating a non-constipating diet. (EXCEPTION: normal if breastfed infant older than 2 months AND BMs are not painful.)
- Toilet training is in progress.
- Constipation is a recurrent ongoing problem.

### Parent Care at Home if:

- Constipation is mild and you don't think your child needs to be seen.

## HOME CARE FOR CONSTIPATION

### Normal BMs:

- Once children are on a regular diet (1 yr), the normal range for BMs is 3 per day to 1 every 2-3 days.
- Any child with discomfort during BM passage or prolonged straining may need treatment with dietary changes.

### Diet for Infants Under 1 Year:

- For infants > 1 month on breast milk or formula alone: Add 1 oz/month-old of apple, pear, prune juice per day.
- For infants > 4 months: Add high fiber baby foods twice/day (peas, beans, apricots, prunes, peaches, pears, plums).

### Diet for Children Over 1 Year Old:

- Increase 100% fruit juice (apple, pear, cherry, grape, apricot, prune), or give 1 teaspoon Milk of Magnesia once or twice a day if you prefer not to give juice. Citrus juices are not helpful.
- Add high fiber fruits and vegetables (peas, beans, broccoli, bananas, apricots, peaches, pears, figs, prunes, dates).
- Increase whole grain foods (bran flakes, bran muffins, graham crackers, oatmeal, brown rice, whole wheat bread).
- Decrease milk products (milk, ice cream, cheese, yogurt) to 3 servings a day.
- If diet alone fails:* Add 1 teaspoon Milk of Magnesia once or twice a day.

### Stop Toilet Training:

- Temporarily put your child back in diapers or pull-ups.
- Reassure him that the poops won't hurt when they come out.
- Praise him for the release of BMs.
- Avoid any punishment or power struggles about holding back poops, sitting on the potty, or resistance to training.

### Sitting on the Toilet (if toilet trained):

- Establish a regular bowel pattern by having child sit on the toilet for 10 minutes after meals, especially breakfast.

### Warm Water for Rectal Pain:

- Warmth helps many children relax the anal sphincter and release a BM.
- For prolonged straining, have your child sit in warm water.

**Call your doctor if constipation continues after making the recommended changes, if your child becomes worse, or develops any of the "Call Your Doctor" symptoms!**