

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!