



## **CONSTIPATION**

### **What is constipation?**

Constipation is having difficulty passing stool (bowel movements). It is common in young children as their diets and food preferences change. It is also common when children are learning how to use the toilet.

### **How is it diagnosed?**

- Reported history.
- Physical exam
- Your provider may order an x-ray of your child's abdomen.

### **What are the signs of constipation?**

- Pain with passing stools
- Hard, pebbly, rock-like stools
- The stool is so large it clogs the toilet.
- Large ball of stool in rectum (seen on x-ray)
- Abdominal (belly) pain
- Infrequent stools (only one in 3 to 7 days)
- Stool soiling or accidents in underwear
- Blood on toilet paper

### **How do I prevent constipation in my child?**

Check with your child's provider to help you decide what would work best for your child. A satisfactory program for preventing constipation requires trial and error, time and patience. Keep in mind that each bowel program is different for each child. Try various methods until the successful one is found for your child.

- If your child is toilet trained, have him or her sit on the toilet for 5-10 minutes after breakfast and dinner.
- If the child's feet do not touch the floor when sitting on the toilet, put a stool or box under their feet so knees are slightly higher than hips. This squat position helps pass stool.
- Praise your child for sitting the desired amount of time even if he or she does not have a bowel movement.
- Clean the skin well after each bowel movement or accident. This prevents skin irritation. When the skin hurts, children may try to hold the stool.
- Encourage active play and exercise because a lack of activity tends to slow bowel function.

### **What should my child eat to prevent constipation?**

Encourage drinking water during the day. If your child drinks juice, try apple or pear juice. Make sure your child is eating a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grain products each day.



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One way to estimate how many grams of fiber your child needs each day is to take your child's age and add 5. For example: A 5-year-old should get about 10 grams of fiber every day. A 10-year-old should get 15 grams of fiber a day.

Limit apples, rice, Jell-O, milk, and other dairy products (substitute with non-dairy cream or soybean milk) until your child is passing soft stools daily.

### **What method should I use to help my child pass the stool?**

Talk to your child's provider about **which** of these methods to use, **when**, and **how**:

- **Stool softener:** medicine that prevents hardening of the stool. It can be taken on a regular basis. Your provider can tell you which one is best for your child.
- **Suppository:** medicine inserted into the rectum(bottom) that stimulates the bowel and causes it to contract.
- **Enema:** A liquid is flushed into the intestine through the rectum(bottom) to stimulate the bowel.

### **What else do I need to know?**

Many children who have wetting problems also have constipation. When a child is constipated, the rectum may be full of hard stool. This can affect the bladder so it does not hold the amount of urine it should. A bowel program needs to be used, along with a timed toileting program, to successfully stop wetting.

### **When should I call the clinic?**

- Constipation continues and no stool is passed in 48 hours.
- Abdominal pain
- Continues soiling or having stool accidents in the underwear.
- Any red streaks of blood in the stool

### **Questions?**

This information is not specific to your child but provides general information. If you have any questions, please call your clinic.