

Constipation

What?

Hard, painful stools

Infrequent, irregular stooling

Why?

DIET : Not enough water or fiber, too much dairy

Consequences?

Withholding of stool (may result in overflow soiling)

Anal fissure (blood on tissue or stool)

What to Do?

Encourage regular daily stooling

Increase water (8-10 glasses per day)

Increase fiber (wheat bread, vegetables, see below)

Decrease dairy products

Prune juice - Apple Juice

Diet Treatment for Older Children (More than 1 Year Old)

- Make sure that your child eats fruits or vegetables at least three times each day (raw unpeeled fruits and vegetables are best). Some examples are prunes, figs, dates, raisins, peaches, pears, apricots, beans, celery, peas, cauliflower, broccoli, and cabbage. (**Warning:** Avoid any foods your child can't chew easily.)
- Increase bran. Bran is an excellent natural stool softener because it has a high fiber content. Make sure that your child's daily diet includes a source of bran, such as one of the new "natural" cereals, unmilled bran, bran flakes, bran muffins, shredded wheat, graham crackers, oatmeal, high-fiber cookies, brown rice, or whole wheat bread. Popcorn is one of the best high-fiber foods for children over 4 years old.
- Decrease consumption of constipating foods, such as milk, ice cream, yogurt, cheese, and cooked carrots.
- Increase the amount of fruit juices your child drinks. (**Exception:** Orange juice is not as helpful as others.)

Diet

Diet is very important in keeping stools bulky and soft. Certain foods may cause constipation if taken in large amounts, but there is lots of individual variation. Thus, you should observe the effect of a food on your child before prohibiting it. The list of foods that **may** cause constipation include sweets, breads and cereals made with refined grains, pasta, rice, potatoes, dairy products, peanut butter, meats, pears, apples, bananas, and "junk" foods. Generally, a diet high in fiber prevents constipation. Learn to read labels and choose foods high in fiber. A general "rule of thumb" is to add 5 to the child's age and this gives the number of daily grams of fiber recommended.

A suggested diet to avoid constipation:

Breakfast: Whole grain cereal with bran (Bran Chex, Raisin Bran, Corn Bran), rolled oats, fresh fruit, bran muffins. Make pancakes waffles, or French toast with addition of "Miller's Bran" to the batter.

Lunch: Make sandwiches with whole grain breads. Fresh fruits and vegetables.

Dinner: Include salad and vegetables, brown rice. Add Miller's Bran" to home baked breads, muffins, or pastries, or sprinkle it on yogurt or applesauce.

Snack: Dried fruits (raisins, prunes, apricots, etc.), fresh fruits and vegetables, popcorn.

Beverage: Fruit juices, especially prune juice. Water, 4 to 8 glasses a day.

Another alternative are high fiber cookies and crackers found in the natural foods section of the supermarket, like "Fiberall" wafers, "Fibermed" biscuits, or Fruit-eze.

Toileting

If your child has been withholding stools, then a specific time should be set aside each day when he can sit on the toilet without distractions for 15 minutes. This usually works best right after breakfast and again after dinner. No comment should be made whether or not the child has a BM. Don't punish him for failure. It may take several months to establish regularity, and then the child should again be left to use the toilet when he feels the need.

Medication

If changing your child's diet is impossible or doesn't work, there are some safe over the counter medications that be used.

1. Bulk forming agents: These are the safest and most natural agents and may be used daily without worry.
 - a) psyllium, e.g., Metamucil, Perdiem (metamucil fiber wafers)
 - b) methylcellulose, e.g. Citrucell
 - c) polycarbophil, e.g., FiberCon, Konsyl
 - d) Maltsupex

2. Lubricants. These soften the stool and make it more slippery and easy to pass. They are also very safe even when used daily.
 - a) Mineral oil - plain or flavored (Kondremull) 2 tsp at night in juice
 - b) Docusate sodium, e.g. Colace, Surfak, Correctol (cold)

3. Hyperosmolar agents. These draw water from the body into the intestine, making the stool looser and less dry. Can be used fairly often without worry, though probably not everyday.
 - a) Milk of Magnesia (Phillip's), given by mouth. 2 tsp at night
 - b) Sodium phosphate enemas (Fleets)
 - c) Glycerin suppositories

4. Stimulant laxatives. These may be used for an occasional bout of constipation or when nothing else works, but probably not more than once a month.
 - a) Cascara, e.g. Nature's Remedy
 - b) Senna, e.g., Senokot, ExLax
 - c) Bisacodyl, e.g., Dulcolax (oral or suppository)
 - d) Castor oil, e.g. Purge

Above all, remember that the frequency or appearance of a child's stool alone is not indicative of health or disease. You should only be concerned if he has symptoms that could be related to constipation. Be sure to call the advice nurse or your pediatrician if you have any questions.