

About 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
- Postponing 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 (AFTER 9AM AND BEFORE 4PM) 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.
- ❖ Child may be “blocked up”.
- ❖ Leaking stool.
- ❖ Suppository or enema needed recently to relieve pain.
- ❖ Days between BMs longer than 3 while eating a nonconstipating 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.

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.
- The every 4-5 day kids all have pain with passage and prolonged straining.
- The every 3 day kids often drift into longer intervals and then develop symptoms.
- Passing a BM should be fun, or at least free of discomfort.
- Any child with discomfort during BM passage or prolonged straining at least needs 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) (citrus fruit juices are not helpful).
- Add high-fiber fruits & 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 per day.
- *If diet alone fails: Add 1 tablespoon Dark Karo syrup or mineral oil once or twice daily.*

SITTING ON THE TOILET (IF TOILET TRAINED):

- Establish a regular bowel pattern by sitting 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 or apply a warm wet cotton ball to the anus.

