Constipation

Definition:

- Pain or crying during the passage of a stool
  - *And/or*
- Unable to pass a stool after straining or pushing longer than 10 minutes
  - *And/or*
- 3 or more days without a stool
  - EXCEPTION: breastfed and over 4 weeks old; if tummy is soft and infant acting normal, can go for up to 5 days without stooling

What are some causes for constipation?

1.) There might not be enough fluid and/or fiber in the diet and the stool gets progressively drier, harder and more difficult to pass.

2.) Some children may have gastrointestinal tracts that move at a more leisurely pace. This tends to run in families.

3.) Food intolerance can affect digestion.

Who gets constipated?

Many children have an occasional bout of constipation. This often happens during vacations when everyone is eating on the go, not eating as much fiber, or not drinking enough water. Similarly any change in routine can affect the child's stooling patterns and lead to constipation. Toddlers tend to like dairy products. If most of the diet is milk and cheese, their stool can become hard and dry as the milk is digested.

What can I do if my child is constipated?

Increase fluids and give children more fruits and fiber cereals. You may also need to reduce your child's dairy intake.

What if I've tried diet changes and my child is still constipated?

Seek medical attention. Laxatives, stool softeners and bulking agents should only be given by the direction of your doctor.

What if my child is holding back stool?

A vicious cycle can build in which the stool becomes harder and more painful to pass. If you know your child is "working on" passing a large stool and they're not toilet trained, try to get them in a squatting position by taking them for a walk in a baby carrier or a stroller with they knees bent. Bicycling their legs while they lie on a bed also helps work the relevant muscles. Warm baths might helps as well. If the stool has become very large, the child's rectum might bleed after it's passed. Putting A&D ointment or other diaper ointment can help.

Holding back might occur with chronic constipation. The area just above the rectum can become stretched. The problem then worsens because backed-up stool can get larger and more painful to pass. The child can become fearful of defecation because it hurts.

Suggestions for ongoing treatment?

Your child may be given multiple medications to clear the constipation. Sometimes children need to be hospitalized to clear the impaction. It's important once things are cleaned out that ongoing treatment be started.

Mineral Oil: (1-4mL/kg/day) _____

- Give 1-2 times per day (i.e. morning and bedtime)
- Give multivitamin around dinnertime
- Once stools are slippery for a 2 weeks, then start weaning over 2 weeks
- Most children use mineral oil for about 2 months
- Chilling it in the refrigerator and immediately giving something sweet and tart (like a sip from a juice box) makes it more palatable. There are some flavored forms of mineral oil, like Kondremul, which has a marshmallow flavor.

Flax Seed Oil: _____

Flax Seed Meal: _____

Miralax: _____

High Fiber Diet:

- Fruit cocktails and canned peaches or pears
- Crackling oat bran cereal (can also be given by the handful as a snack)
- Corn bran cereal
- Bran and Corn Chex cereal
- Homemade oatmeal cookies (use high fiber type of oatmeal)
- Popcorn (for older kids)
- Corn on the cob (or frozen corn)
- Dried apricots and raisins
- Fig Newtons
- Fruit roll-ups made from dried apricots
- Raisinets
- Cantaloupe and blueberries
- Pureed celery (add to meatballs or tomato sauce so not noticeable)
- Branola bread
- Fruit punches made with camomile tea (i.e. Celestial Seasonings Sunburst C tea)

Go to the ED now if:

- Acute abdominal pain with constipation (includes persistent crying or straining)
- Acute rectal pain with constipation (includes straining >10 minutes)
- Vomiting >3 times in the last 2 hours
- Large bleeding from anal fissure
- Breastfed newborn (<1month old) with signs of dehydration
- Age <12 months with recent onset of weak cry, weak suck, or weak muscles

See within 24 hours by Appointment:

- Age younger than 2 months
  (**EXCEPTION: normal straining and grunting)**
- Child may be "blocked up"
- Parent wants child seen

See within 3 days in office if:

- Leaking stool
- Pain or crying with passage of stools and occurs 3 or more times
- Small bleeding from anal fissure recurs 3 or more times
- Suppository or enema needed recently to relieve pain
- Days between stools 3 or more while eating a non-constipating diet (**EXCEPTION: Normal if breastfed infant >4 weeks old AND stools are not painful)**

Call and make an appointment if:

- Constipation continues after making dietary changes.
- You child becomes worse.