

CONSTIPATION IN CHILDREN

Constipation is a condition which involves pain when passing hard, dry stools and/or less frequent bowel movements.

Constipation in children is common and usually not caused by a serious disease. Instead, it is often caused by eating too many constipating foods (such as dairy) or drinking too little liquid throughout the day.

When constipation lasts for a long time, children can develop a large lump of dry, hard stool that is stuck in the rectum (the lowest part of the bowel). This can cause a child to soil their underpants as small amounts of stool can leak around this “lump”. It’s important to remember that this soiling is not done on purpose so punishment is not appropriate.

Constipation can be treated but will take some patience as it can take quite some time (sometimes months) for things to improve.

Eating and Drinking

Encourage your child to make simple changes:

- Limit dairy intake to two servings/day (age 8 and younger); 3 to 4 servings/day (ages 9–18).
- Eat more high-fibre food and drink enough liquid. A normal amount of both fluids and fibre is recommended. The following link has advice on fibre

<http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/En/HealthAZ/HealthandWellness/Nutrition/Pages/Higher-Fibre-Diet.aspx>

Toileting

A regular routine around going to the bathroom is important. For example, encourage your child to sit on the toilet for 5 to 10 minutes twice a day, ideally right after meals. Make sure that the child’s feet are supported if they do not reach the ground. If your child is old enough, you can provide a reward system (like stickers or other treat) when your child uses the bathroom regularly. And be sure to remind your child not to ignore the urge to go.

Medication

Some children need medication to treat constipation. The most effective medication is called PEG 3350 which comes in powder form and dissolves easily in juice or water. Treatment generally lasts for at least two months. All constipation symptoms should have gone for at least one month before the treatment can be stopped. Be sure to check with your care provider before stopping any medication.

Sources: **1)** Rowan-Legg A, Canadian Paediatric Society CPC. Managing functional constipation in children. *Paediatrics & child health*. Dec 2011;16(10):661-670.; **2)** Kosar L, Schuster B. Management of constipation. *RxFiles*. 2017. <http://www.rxfiles.ca>.; **3)** Tabbers MM, DiLorenzo C, Berger MY, et al. Evaluation and treatment of functional constipation in infants and children: evidence-based recommendations from ESPGHAN and NASPGHAN. *Journal of pediatric gastroenterology and nutrition*. Feb 2014;58(2):258-274.

