Cannizzaro Integrative Pediatric Center

CONSTIPATION - INFANTS

A constipated child is one who has infrequent bowel movements or hard, dry stools, a common childhood problem.

Common causes of constipation can include early toilet training and/or changes in diet. Most cases are temporary and can be addressed through simple dietary changes such as eating more fiber-rich fruits and vegetables and drinking more fluids. Occasionally laxatives, enemas, or other supplements may be needed to resolve the condition. Symptoms may include:

- Less than 3 bowel movements a week
- Stools that are hard, dry, and difficult to pass
- Large-diameter stools that may obstruct the toilet
- Pain while having a bowel movement
- Abdominal pain
- Traces of liquid or clay-like stool in your child's underwear; a sign that stool is backed up in the rectum
- Blood on the surface of hard stool

If your child fears that having a bowel movement will hurt, he or she may try to avoid it. You may notice them crossing their legs, clenching their buttocks, twisting their body, or making faces when attempting to hold stool. Holding stool will make the constipation worse.

Constipation in children usually isn't serious but chronic constipation could lead to complications or signal an underlying condition. Always reach out to our office if the constipation lasts longer than 2 weeks or is accompanied by fever, vomiting, blood in the stool, abdominal swelling, weight loss, painful tears in the skin around the anus (anal fissures), or intestinal protrusion out of the anus (rectal prolapse).

Treatment

While every child is treated with a plan that is individualized to their specific needs, some common treatments may include:

- Over-the-counter fiber supplements or stool softeners: If your child doesn't get a lot of fiber in their diet, adding an over-the-counter fiber supplement, such as Metamucil, Benefiber or Citrucel, might help. However, your child needs to drink at least 10 to 12 ounces of water daily for these products to work well. You may also use Mommy's Bliss Constipation Ease + Prebiotics liquid, 1 teaspoon daily. This is an organic formulation made from plant and seed extracts with a small amount of magnesium. It is found in many stores as well as Amazon.

- If an accumulation of stool creates a blockage it may require a laxative or enema to help remove the blockage. Examples include: polyethylene glycol (Glycolax, MiraLax) and mineral oil. Do not use without first calling our office.

- Probiotics: daily probiotic should be continued

- Dietary changes: A diet rich in fiber can help your child's body form soft, bulky stool. The recommended intake for dietary fiber is 14 grams for every 1,000 calories in your child's diet.

For younger children, this translates to an intake of about 20 grams of dietary fiber a day. Offer your child high-fiber foods, such as those listed below. Start slowly, adding just several grams of fiber a day over several weeks to reduce the amount of gas and bloating that can occur in someone who's not used to consuming high-fiber foods.

Good sources of fiber are:

- whole grains, such as whole wheat bread and pasta, oatmeal, and bran flake cereals

- legumes, such as lentils, black beans, kidney beans, soybeans, and chickpeas

- fruits, such as berries, apples with the skin on, oranges, peaches, papaya, and pears

- vegetables, such as carrots, broccoli, green peas, and collard greens

- nuts, such as almonds, peanuts, and pecans

Cut back on constipating foods. Give them fewer foods that might lead to constipation, such as milk, ice cream, yogurt and cheese. Bananas and white rice can also be constipating. Additionally, to help prevent or relieve constipation, they should avoid foods with little to no fiber, such as chips, fast food, meat, prepared foods, some frozen meals and snack foods, processed foods, such as hot dogs and some microwavable dinners.

Water and other fluids (but no carbonated drinks) help soften the stool. Do not offer too much milk as it contributes to constipation. Give your child prune juice. It can be mixed with other juices (such as apple juice) if your child doesn't like the taste.

Adequate time for bowel movements: (If in any stage of potty training.) Encourage your child to sit on the toilet for 5 to 10 minutes within 30 minutes after each meal. Follow the routine every day, even during holidays and vacations. If you suspect that toilet training may be playing a role in your child's constipation, take a break from toilet training for a bit to see if the constipation improves.

Be supportive: Reward your child's efforts, not results. Give them small rewards such as stickers or a special book or game for trying to move their bowels.

Massage: Gently massaging your child's abdomen may relax the muscles that support the bladder and intestines, helping to promote bowel activity.

Acupuncture: This traditional Chinese medicine involves the insertion and manipulation of fine needles into various parts of the body. The therapy may help with constipation-related abdominal pain.

Regular physical activity can encourage bowel movements.