

Constipation

DEFINITION

- Pain or crying during the passage of a stool (bowel movement or BM) OR
- Unable to pass a stool after straining or pushing longer than 10 minutes OR
- 3 or more days without a stool (Exception: Breastfed and over 1 month old)

Causes

- High milk or cheese diet
- Low fiber diet
- Postponing stools(Habitual)
- Slow intestinal transit time (genetic differences)

Imitators of Constipation

- If breastfed and over 1 month old: Infrequent stools 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 stool is normal in young infants. (Reason: difficult to pass stool 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 stools - Size relates to amount of food consumed and stool frequency. Large eaters have larger stools.

Hard or dry stools are also normal if passed easily without straining. Often relates to poor fiber intake. Some children even have small, dry rabbit-pellet-like stools.

HOME CARE ADVICE FOR CONSTIPATION

- **Normal Stools:**
Once children are on a regular diet (age 1 year), the normal range for stools is 3 per day to 1 every 2 days.
The every 4 and 5 day kids all have pain with passage and prolonged straining.
The every 3 day kids usually drift into longer intervals and then develop symptoms.
Passing a stool should be fun, or at least free of discomfort.
Any child with discomfort during stool passage or prolonged straining at least needs treatment with dietary changes.
- **Diet for Infants Under 1 Year:**
For infants over 1 month old only on breast milk or formula, add fruit juices 1

ounce (30 ml) per month of age per day. Pear or apple juice are OK at any age. (Reason: treating a symptom)

For infants over 4 months old, also add baby foods with high fiber content twice a day (peas, beans, apricots, prunes, peaches, pears, plums).

If on finger foods, add cereal and small pieces of fresh fruit.

- **Diet for Children Over 1 Year Old:**

Increase fruit juice (apple, pear, cherry, grape, prune) (note: citrus fruit juices are not helpful).

Add fruits and vegetables high in fiber content (peas, beans, broccoli, bananas, apricots, peaches, pears, figs, prunes, dates) 3 or more times per day.

Increase whole grain foods (bran flakes, bran muffins, graham crackers, oatmeal, brown rice, and whole wheat bread. Popcorn can be used if over 4 years old.)

Limit milk products (milk, ice cream, cheese, yogurt) to 3 servings per day.

- **Stop Toilet Training:** Temporarily put your child back in diapers or pull-ups.

Reassure him that the poops won't hurt when they come out.

Praise him for the release of stools.

Avoid any pressure, punishment or power struggles about holding back poops, sitting on the potty or resistance to training.

- **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 stool. For prolonged straining, have your child sit in warm water or apply a warm wet cotton ball to the anus.

- **Flexed Position:**

Help your baby by holding the knees against the chest to simulate squatting (the natural position for pushing out a stool). It's difficult to have a stool while lying down.

Gently pumping the lower abdomen may also help.

- **Call Doctor If:**

Constipation continues after making dietary changes

Your child becomes worse