



Constipation Information

What is constipation?

Constipation is a word used to describe stools (bowel movements) that are passed less often than every three days. This term also describes bowel movements that are hard and/or difficult or painful to pass, even if the person has bowel movements several times per week. Constipation is very common and affects about 30% of children.

Soiling describes the leakage of liquid or formed stool in underwear. Most often, soiling or 'accidents' occur because there has been constipation and, over time, a buildup of stool in the rectum (called an impaction). When constipation and impaction have gone on for many months, changes happen in muscles and nerves in the rectum (the end part of the large intestine) such that many children cannot feel the need to go nor be able to stop stool that may leak out involuntarily.

How common is constipation and soiling?

Constipation and soiling is a common health problem in children. It occurs in 3 to 4 of every 100 children at preschool age and 1 to 2 of every 100 children at school age.

Why does my child have constipation?

Most often, (about 95% of the time in children), the problem starts for one or a combination of several factors such as:

- Diets low in fiber foods and high in constipating foods (bread, potatoes, pasta, rice, bananas or cheese)
- Not taking enough time to sit and try to pass stool on a routine basis

- Painful experiences around stool passage
- Withholding of stools as a result of past discomfort
- Medications that are constipating;
- Normal developmental features
- A family pattern of slower bowel function. Constipation due to such factors is called 'functional'.

What is the treatment for constipation?

Over one-half of children with functional constipation and soiling recover after 6 to 24 months of closely following treatment recommendations. The treatment includes:

1. Medical evaluation

2. Teaching

Educate yourself and your child about the constipation problem.

3. Clean out

If your child has a stool impaction, your health care provider will discuss ways for 'clean-out'. Your child's clean-out method will be:

4. Maintenance Program

The purpose of the maintenance program is to help your child achieve complete stool passages every day. This will prevent repeated stool impactions in the rectum and allow the muscles and nerves of the rectum to recover strength and feeling. This recovery requires many months (at least 4 - 6 months). It is important to follow the treatment recommendations every day. The children of families that do, often recover more quickly. The most successful treatment programs use a combination of medication, behavior and

dietary approaches.

5. Wean off medication support

This is done while maintaining progress in diet and behavioral areas.

What is the contact information?

If you have any question, problems or concerns call the Pediatric Surgery clinic from 8-5:00pm Monday thru Friday, 734-764-4151. After 5:00pm or on the weekends if you have urgent issues call hospital paging at 734 936-4000 and ask the operator to page the Pediatric Surgeon “on call”.

Are there any other resources for constipation?

Kids books:

Once Upon a Potty (1980) (his and her versions and toy-set available), A. Frankel, Barron's;
Everyone Poops (1984 Japan, 1993 U.S.) T. Gomi, Kane/Miller;
I Have To Go. (1990) A Sesame Street Toddler Book, Random House
Potty Time (1988) A. Civardi, J Langley, Simon & Schuster.

Videos:

It's Potty Time. (1991) Learning Through Entertainment, Video Distributors, Gastonia, N.C., 28052;
Once Upon a Potty, (1980) Barren's Home Video.

Websites:

KidsHealth

<http://kidshealth.org/kid/>

UMHS Your Child Website

<http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/index.htm>

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