



# Constipation Maintenance Program

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## **What is the maintenance program for constipation?**

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.

## **What is the maintenance program protocol?**

### **1. Medications:**

If your health care provider suggests medications give them every day. It is often easier to remember to give the medicine if it is at the same time or within the same routine every day. Your child's medication, amount and times will be:

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### **2. Behavioral Steps:**

**Write down all stool outputs** (in toilet or accident) on a chart or calendar (see sample chart).

- A successful maintenance program = one to two comfortable, mushy stools each day and no soiling 'accidents'. Keep up the good work!
- Risk for re-impaction = stools less than every three days, hard and/or large stools, and soiling 'accidents'. Review the chart with your health care provider.

### **Start positive toileting routines**

Many children with chronic constipation and soiling cannot feel the urge to pass stool. Therefore, have regular toilet sitting times to help your child have their outputs in the toilet and avoid soiling accidents. It takes patience and positive attention to help children build successful toileting routines.

- Direct your child to sit on the toilet 2 to 4 times per day. Use statements rather than questions (e.g., "**It is time** to sit on the toilet"). Choose times for sitting which can be routine and calm. Sitting after meals takes advantage of the normal gastro-colic reflex to produce stool.
- When your child is sitting on the toilet, be sure his/her feet are firmly placed on a flat surface. This will help your child push out stools. If using an adult-sized toilet, a foot stool may be needed.
- Check to see if your child has his/her hands on their knees. Holding on to the toilet seat may increase muscle tension at pelvic floor and make it harder to pass stool comfortably and completely.
- Work toward a sit time of about 5 minutes.
- Praise your child each time he or she sits on the toilet and for any other helpful behavior.

### **3. Maintain a positive outlook**

Privileges and incentive programs are often useful and needed for motivating a child to learn new toileting behaviors.

- A privilege is something that happens soon after the desired toileting behavior. For example, if your child cooperates with having a toilet sit at a planned time, then a favorite activity can follow.
- Refusal to do the toilet sit could lead to the loss of the favorite activity or privilege until the next planned sit time. Loss of the privilege would be a 'natural consequence'.
- A privilege system works best if the parent is ok with the child achieving the favorite activity or not achieving it.
- Other positive incentives such as stickers for younger children should also occur right after the desired behavior.
- Older children are often interested in adding up points or stars over many days and "cashing them in" for a special activity or treat.
- Begin rewarding your child at a level where he/she can reach some success then move forward (e.g., begin with a reward for sitting; later on, reward for outputs).

### **4. Avoid punitive approaches and embarrassment**

Tell your child what you expect but be supportive and respectful. Being angry or using shaming or embarrassment are not helpful and can make matters worse.

### **5. Diet**

**Increase dietary fiber** to your child's age in years + 5 every day. For example, a 5 year-old child should have 10 grams of fiber each day. Your health care provider may suggest a higher amount, up to age in years + 10.

The amount of fiber your health care provider recommends is

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- Good fiber choices include fiber-rich breads, crackers, cereals, fruits and vegetables
- If your child is a picky eater, consider using a fiber supplement
- Read all food labels to learn the grams of fiber per serving.
- See the attached Fiber Lists for approximate fiber grams in common foods.

**Make sure your child is drinking enough fluids** -- about 2 ounces of clear fluids for each gram of fiber that you target for your child each day. The best clear fluid is water. So, if your child's fiber target is 10, then provide at least 20 oz. clear fluids daily.

If your child's health care provider agrees, lower the amount of constipating foods in the diet. Constipating foods include milk and other dairy products, bananas and gelatins.

Ask your health care provider about your child's calcium needs especially if you are limiting dairy intake.

## 6. Follow up

Your child's health care provider will arrange for routine visits and contact:

Health care provider's Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

## **When should I call the doctor?**

Call us if you have any of the following signs or symptoms:

- Oral temperature over 100.5°F
- Vomiting or bloating

## **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”.

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