

Constipation (Age 1-5)

Definition

- Can't pass a stool or pain (crying) when passing a stool
- Can't pass a stool after straining or pushing longer than 10 minutes
- Passes stools infrequently
- Pass stools every 3 days or longer

Health Information

Normal Frequency of Stools

- Once children are on normal table foods, their stool pattern is like adults. The normal range is 3 stools per day to 1 every 2 days.
- Kids who go every 4 or 5 days almost always have pain with passage.
- Kids who go every 3 days often drift into longer times. Then, they also develop symptoms.
- Any child with pain during stool passage or infrequent stools needs treatment. At the very least, the child should be treated with changes in diet.

Normal Stools and Normal Behaviors

- Brief straining under 10 minutes can occur at times at any age.
- Large stools. Size relates to the amount of food eaten. Large eaters have larger stools.
- Hard or dry stools are also normal if passed easily without too much straining. Often, this relates to poor fiber intake.

Causes

- High milk or cheese diet
- Low fiber diet
- Postponing or holding back stools because of pain
- Holding back stools because of power struggles. Most often, it's a battle around toilet training.
- Slow passage of food through the intestines. Most often, this type runs in families.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- Constipation is common in children.
- Most often, it's from a change in diet. It can also be caused by waiting too long to stool.
- Passing a stool should be pleasant and free of pain.
- Any child with pain during stool passage or infrequent stools needs treatment. At the very least, they need changes in their diet.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. **Diet for Children:**
 - Increase fruit juice (apple, pear, cherry, grape, prune). Note: Citrus fruit juices are not helpful. Vegetable juices are also helpful.
 - Add Vegetables high in fiber content 2 times per day. Examples are peas, beans, broccoli.
 - Add Fruits high in fiber content 2 times per day. Examples are bananas, apricots, peaches, pears, figs, prunes, or dates. Raw fruits are most helpful.
 - Myth: bananas and apples make constipation worse. No evidence for this. They actually contain fiber and make stools softer.
 - Increase whole grain foods. Examples are bran flakes or muffins, graham crackers, and oatmeal. Brown rice and whole wheat bread are also helpful. Popcorn can be used if over 4 years old.
 - Limit milk products (milk, ice cream, cheese, yogurt) to 3 servings per day.
 - Fluids: Give enough fluids to stay well hydrated. Reason: This keeps the stool soft.
3. **Probiotic Yogurt for 1 Year and Older:**
 - Probiotics are the good bacteria that improve our health.
 - They are a natural way to help constipation. Reason: they cause softer stools and more frequent stools.
 - Age limit: use for 1 year and older
 - Probiotic yogurts (such as Activa) can be found in the yogurt department of regular supermarkets.
 - Probiotic liquid drinks (such as Good Belly) are also available there.
 - Give 1 serving per day. See the product label.
 - Probiotics work best if given on an empty stomach. That means no food in the last 2 or more hours.
4. **Stool Softeners:**
 - If a change in diet doesn't help, you can add a stool softener.
 - Miralax is a good one. Give it each day with dinner.
 - Dose: 1 teaspoon (5 mL) powder mixed in 2 ounces (60 mL) of water or fruit juice.
 - Stool softeners should produce soft stools in 1 to 3 days.
 - After 1 week, try to phase it out.
5. **Encourage Sitting on the Toilet (if toilet trained):**
 - Set up a normal stool routine.
 - How long to sit: about 5 minutes.
 - When to sit: Have your child sit on the toilet 20 minutes after meals.
 - This is especially important after breakfast. Reason: The best time to get strong contractions in the rectum.
 - If you see your child holding back a stool, also take to the toilet for a sit (if cooperates).
 - During sits, stay with your child and be a coach. Just focus on helping the poop come out.
 - Do not distract your child. Do not allow your child to play with video devices, games or books during sits.
 - Once he passes a normal size stool, he doesn't need to sit anymore that day.
6. **Stop Toilet Training if Holding Back Stools Persists:**
 - Put your child back in diapers or pull-ups for a short time.
 - Tell him that the poops won't hurt when they come out.
 - Praise him for passing poops into a diaper.
 - Holding back stools is harmful. Use rewards to help your child give up this bad habit.
 - Avoid any pressure or punishment. Also, never force your child to sit on the potty against his will. Reason: It will cause a power struggle.
 - Treats and hugs always work better.

7. Prevention of Constipation:

- Eat a high fiber diet. Drink plenty of fluids.
- Sit on the toilet and pass a stool around the same time each day.
- Don't ignore the signal of a full rectum.

8. What to Expect:

- Most often, changes in diet helps constipation within a few days.

Call Your Doctor If

- Constipation lasts more than 1 week after making changes to diet
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

Author: Barton Schmitt MD, FAAP

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