

Accident & Emergency Department

## Constipation

Information for parents and carers

### What is constipation?

Constipation happens when a child passes fewer than three stools (poo) per week that are often hard pellets - a bit like rabbit droppings.

Children may strain and find it painful to pass stools.

### What is faecal impaction?

Stool build up inside the bowel when there is not enough bowel movement over a period of days and weeks. This can lead to large, painful motions. There can also be accidents due to overflow of watery stools around the hard poo that doesn't move anywhere.

### How common is it?

Childhood constipation is very common, especially in younger children.

One quarter of people with constipation start as babies.

Longer lasting symptoms happen most often during potty training

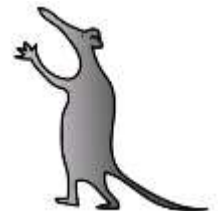
One third of 4- 7 year olds are constipated at any given time.

For one out of 20 primary school children constipation will last for more than six months. <sup>(1)</sup>

### Causes of constipation

Certain lifestyle factors can make constipation worse or more likely in children:

1. Not enough having enough fibre in the food they eat, or not drinking enough water.
2. "Holding "in stools because they don't want to stop what they are doing or don't want to use an unfamiliar or dirty toilet.
3. Not getting enough exercise.
4. Changes in their routine.
5. Other family members who have constipation.
6. Taking certain medicines.



### How you can help a child with constipation:

- Make it easy for your child.
- Set a toilet time each day - make it fun with books etc.
- If it hurts, tell them to stop and try again later.
- Increase their fibre intake- This means a varied diet with wholegrains (choosing wholegrain bread, pasta etc), plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- Try pureed fruit and veg for babies, and grating vegetables into meals they love for fussy toddlers. Prunes or pureed prunes are also a great source of fibre. (See below for 'Fibre Chart')
- Increase their intake of fluid. Aim for six to eight glasses of water per day. Older babies (over six months old) can have water between their feeds.

## When should I seek help?

Symptoms of constipation are normally managed by families with help from their health visitor or school nurse. If your child has not passed stool for five or more days you should make an appointment with your GP as further treatment may be necessary.

If your child has a swollen tummy, is vomiting or passes a lot of blood alongside their constipation then they should be seen in the Emergency Department.

## Fibre Chart

Eating a varied diet is a great way to improve symptoms of constipation. Below is a list of some foods along with their fibre content to help you compare them. <sup>(1)</sup>

Food	Portion	Fibre (g)
Brown bread	1 slice	0.9
Wholemeal pitta	1 mini	1.8
All-Bran	Small bowl	7.2
Corn Flakes	Small bowl	0.2
Cereal bar	1	1.0
Gingernuts	1	0.2
Pear	1 medium	3.3
Grapes	10	0.6
Baked beans	2 tablespoons	3.0
Broad beans	2 tablespoons	7.8
Celery	1 stick	0.3
Spinach	2 tablespoons	1.7
Brown rice	2 tablespoons	0.6
Wholemeal spaghetti	3 tablespoons	3.1
Prunes	5	2.3
Dates (dried)	5	3.0

## Medicines

Long term constipation can be difficult as it may not improve straight away even with treatment. If other changes have not completely helped, your doctor may decide to prescribe medicine. For example, Lactulose® or Movicol® help to absorb water into the bowel and increase bowel movements. Medicines may need to be taken for weeks or months for the best results.

## More Information

**PromoCon** – Promoting Continence and Products Awareness, impartial information and advice  
Web address: [www.promocon.co.uk](http://www.promocon.co.uk) E mail: [promocon@disabledliving.co.uk](mailto:promocon@disabledliving.co.uk)

**CORE Digestive Disorders Foundation**  
Web address: [www.digestedisorders.org.uk](http://www.digestedisorders.org.uk) E mail: [info@corecharity.org.uk](mailto:info@corecharity.org.uk)

**Childhood Constipation** Web address: [www.childhoodconstipation.com](http://www.childhoodconstipation.com)

**Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence (ERIC)**  
Web address [www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk) E mail [info@eric.org.uk](mailto:info@eric.org.uk)

**NHS Direct** Web address: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)



<sup>(1)</sup> NORGINE Understanding Childhood Constipation July 2011

Please Note: Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust is not responsible for the content of external websites.

This leaflet only gives general information. You must always discuss the individual treatment of your child with the appropriate member of staff. Do not rely on this leaflet alone for information about your child's treatment. This information can be made available in other languages and formats if requested.

Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust  
Eaton Road, Liverpool L12 2AP  
Tel: 0151 228 4811  
[www.alderhey.nhs.uk](http://www.alderhey.nhs.uk)

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