

Patient Information

Constipation

Children's Services



Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to explain constipation.

What is Constipation?

Constipation is the name for bowel movements that are difficult or hard to pass and may be less frequent than normal. Normal frequency of passing stools (poos) can be anything from three times a day, to once every few days.

Symptoms of constipation include pain and straining when passing stools, tummy ache, passing small dry stools, sore bottom, leaking of loose stools, nausea, vomiting and weight loss.

Bowel movement may be painful, so your child may try to prevent having one. The stools become harder and more difficult and painful to push out and the urge to go to the toilet is put off for longer.

What causes Constipation?

- Diet - not drinking enough water or eating enough high fibre foods.
- Holding in stools - because of embarrassment or lack of privacy or time.
- Change in routine - such as going on holiday, moving house, changing schools and change in diet.
- Stress - emotional problems or parental anxiety about the condition may sometimes play a part.
- Lack of exercise - lack of physical activity can cause your child's bowel to become more sluggish and lead to constipation.
- Medicines - some medicines can cause constipation. Please check with your child's doctor or local pharmacist, if you think that this is the cause for your child.

Prevention of Constipation

- Encourage a high fibre diet and plenty of fluids (four to eight glasses a day, according to the child's age) to produce bulky, soft stools, that are easy to pass. Some examples of foods which are high in fibre include fruit, vegetables, cereals and wholemeal bread.
- Discourage fizzy drinks as these fill your child up and make them less likely to want to eat proper meals and foods containing fibre. Drinking a lot of milk may also make constipation worse. However, fruit juices such as apple or prune juice, can have a laxative action.

Try and get your child into a regular toilet habit. Allow plenty of time and try to create a pleasant, private and relaxed environment.

Encourage your child to get lots of active play to increase bowel activity.

Treatments

Most bouts of constipation in children last just a few days. Many children strain to pass a large or hard stool now and then. It is of little concern, so long as a normal pattern soon returns.

Treatment of mild and temporary constipation is the same as for preventing constipation - as described above. That is, a good diet with plenty of fibre and adequate fluids.

The doctor may have prescribed laxative medication for your child. Please read the label on the bottle carefully and store it in a lockable cupboard. Laxatives may need to be taken daily, over several months before your child's bowel pattern returns to normal.

If your child fails to respond to the medications, return to your GP for further advice.

Further information

NHS 111

☎ 111

or Contact your GP

NHS website - www.nhs.uk

Useful Telephone Numbers

Bluebell Ward, Lister Hospital
Stevenage

☎ 01438 284008

Children's Emergency Department
Lister Hospital

☎ 01438 284333

Urgent Care Centre, New QEII
Welwyn Garden City

☎ 01707 247549

Community Children's Nursing Team

☎ 01438 288370