

# CONSTIPATION IN CHILDREN

## How do I know if my child is constipated?

Your child is constipated if one or more of the following are true:

- He or she has fewer than 3 bowel movements a week.
- The stools are hard, dry and unusually large.
- The stools are difficult to pass.

## What causes constipation?

Constipation is likely to happen when your child doesn't drink enough water, milk or fruit juices, or if your child doesn't eat a healthy diet that includes enough fiber. Fiber is found in foods such as cereals, grains, fruits and vegetables. If your child eats a diet high in fat and refined sugars (candy and desserts), he or she is probably not getting fiber, which may result in constipation.

Constipation may also begin when you change your baby from breast milk or baby formula to whole cow's milk, and when you switch from baby food to solid food.

Young children often ignore the urge to have a bowel movement and may become constipated. Your child may not want to interrupt play, ask a teacher or use a public restroom.

Sometimes constipation happens after your child has been sick or has taken certain medicines.

You should not be concerned if your child becomes constipated. Constipation is common in children and usually goes away on its own.

## What can I do if my child is constipated?

There are 3 things you can do to help your child:

1. **Diet**--You can start by increasing the amount of fluid your child drinks every day. It may also help to give your baby a bottle of prune juice every day, or add corn syrup or brown sugar to your baby's formula until his or her bowel movements become regular. Check with your doctor about how much corn syrup or brown sugar to add. You can give an older child large quantities of fluids every day, as well as prune juice, bran cereal, and fruits and vegetables that are high in fiber.

2. **Bowel habit training**--Your child should be taught not to wait to have a bowel movement. To establish a regular bowel habit, ask your child to sit on the toilet for at least 10 minutes at about the same time each day, preferably after a meal. Make sure your child can place his or her feet firmly on the floor while sitting on the toilet. If this is not possible, put a footstool in front of the toilet. While your child is sitting on the toilet, you might let your child read a story book or listen to the radio.
3. **Medicine**--Many laxatives are available to treat constipation in children. The choice of laxative depends on the age of your child and how serious the constipation is. Ask your family doctor to suggest a brand name and tell you how much to use.

If the constipation doesn't get better, take your child to see your family doctor. Constipation can sometimes be a sign of a more serious problem.