



CONSTIPATION

WHAT IS IT?

Constipation is the painful passage of stool or retention of stool causing symptoms. Sometimes children will complain of stomach (abdominal) cramps or pain, fecal soiling (accidents) and have a poor appetite. The absence/infrequency of bowel movements are not the only signs of constipation. Children may have a stool every day but still do not completely empty the colon.

Normal bowel movements vary greatly. They may range from three bowel movements per day to one every couple of days.

Perhaps more important than the frequency of bowel movements is the texture. Bowel movements should not be extremely hard or large, nor should they be painful to expel.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

Constipation may be caused by a combination of reasons, such as: dehydration (not enough water in the diet), low fiber intake, blockage, medications, emotional and behavioral problems (stool withholding, fear of painful bowel movements), neurological problems or hormonal problems.

HOW DO WE TREAT IT?

The treatment plan for your child will vary depending on your child's specific needs. Typically, the treatment involves three aspects.

1. **Medications.** In most cases, your doctor will give your child medication to "clear" the stool initially. A clean out at the start of therapy is often required. This is an important step for the maintenance program to work properly. After this clean out, your child may be placed on maintenance medicines to ensure regular painless bowel movements.
2. **Diet.** Adding foods that are high in fiber may be suggested, such as fruits, vegetables (especially green, leafy vegetables), whole grain breads, cereals and dried beans. The fiber increases bulk in the stool. Additionally, encouraging the intake of juices and water will help.
3. **Habit Training.** Allowing your child to sit on the toilet 5-10 minutes after meals is encouraged (with proper foot support). Additionally, reminding your child to go to the toilet as soon as the urge is present is important. Positive reinforcement for regular bowel movements (i.e. star system or reward system) is helpful. Maintain a positive approach even if your child has soiling episodes.

Most important, PATIENCE is a must. It often takes several months to establish a normal bowel pattern.