

Childhood constipation

Children's Ward

Parent/Carer Information Leaflet



Introduction

Your child has come into hospital with constipation. Although constipation can be distressing for both you and your child, this is a very common problem in childhood and usually it is nothing serious. This leaflet gives information on what it is and how it can be treated.

What is constipation?

For most children, constipation is when your child is passing hard stools (poo), less frequently than normal. Anything from three times a day to every other day can be normal.

If your child has a sudden change of bowel habit, or is unable to have at least three poos a week, it is likely that they have constipation.

Sometimes, if your child has been constipated for a long time, they can have accidents and soil their underwear. This is called overflow soiling and this happens because the build-up of stool in the bowel has become compacted. Softer stool will leak around the hard stool and into the underwear.

What are the symptoms of constipation?

Your child may have one or a combination of the following:

- They pass poo less often.
- They do not want to eat.
- They show signs of tiredness.
- Their poo changes either shape, size, amount or hardness.
- They are pushing hard/straining to pass a poo.
- They stop themselves from pooing by squeezing their buttocks together.
- They have pain in their tummy or back passage.
- They have staining of blood or poo in their underpants which they may attempt to hide from others.
- They become unhappy, irritable, miserable or not themselves.

Why has my child become constipated?

The causes of constipation are often different from child to child. There may be many different reasons why your child might be constipated.

Some of these include:

- Not eating enough healthy foods and fibre.
- Not drinking enough fluids.
- Not doing enough exercise.

However, a lot of children have constipation for no known reason.

There are some more serious causes of constipation such as:

- Some neurological conditions – conditions that affect the nervous system.
- Underactive thyroid gland (hypothyroidism).

- Cystic fibrosis.
- Rare diseases affecting the development of the bowel, such as Hirschsprung's disease.
- A side effect of a medication that your child might be taking.

However, these are quite rare and may not necessarily apply to your child.

Can the doctor give my child anything to help them to go to the toilet?

We will give your child some medication to help with the constipation and to get their bowels moving again:

- Movicol paediatric comes in sachets that you will need to mix with water. Please follow the instructions included in the box.
- If this does not work after a couple of weeks, your doctor might also give you a medication called Senna.

What things can I do to help my child?

If your child is over the age of two years:

- Make sure your child is drinking enough. The recommended amount of fluid intake for a child is roughly six to eight glasses of water or sugar free squash.
- Eating a healthy diet is very important for everyone but especially for people with constipation. The following are some of the recommended foods:
 - Brown bread, chapatti and naan
 - Digestive biscuits
 - Brown pasta and rice
 - Jacket potatoes, skins and wedges
 - Vegetables such as peas and sweetcorn
 - Fresh and dried fruit
 - Weetabix, Shredded Wheat, porridge, Ready Brek, curry, lentils, beans and baked beans

Exercising is also very important to help keep your child's bowels moving. Try to get your child involved in activities such as playing outside, going to the park, bicycle riding, going swimming etc.

Another way to help your child with their constipation is to create good toilet behaviour, for instance:

- Going to the toilet regularly. Encourage your child to use the toilet about 15 minutes after meals and to sit on the toilet for no longer than 5 minutes.
- Give your child plenty of time and try not to rush them.
- Make sure that your child can get to a toilet easily if they need to.
- Try to give them some privacy when they are on the toilet.
- Give your child something to read or play with whilst on the toilet - blowing bubbles can also help.
- Praise your child if they use the toilet, even if they do not manage to have a poo.
- Do not punish your child if they are unable to use the toilet.

If your child is under two, your doctor will give you specific advice.

What should I do when we get home from hospital?

Once you are at home, it is recommended that you monitor your child's bowel movements, to see if the medications the doctor has given are working properly:

- Watch to see how often your child is going to the toilet.
- Check the amount of poo in the toilet after your child has been.
- Look at the consistency of the poo.

When should I be concerned?

If your child develops any of the following symptoms, you should see your GP:

- Weakness in the legs.
- Tummy becomes swollen or bloated.
- Starts being sick.

When should my child be better?

It is important to understand that constipation can take different time scales to fully clear up for each child. If the medication and lifestyle changes do not work immediately, it does not mean that they will not work in the long term.

Can I find out more?

You can find out more from the following weblink:

NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/constipation-and-soiling.aspx>

<https://www.eric.org.uk>

If you have any questions or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Children's Ward on 01384 244271

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/c2-childrens-ward/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email dgft.patient.information@nhs.net

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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