Intestinal Pseudo-Obstruction

Intestinal false blockage is a condition that causes symptoms like those of a bowel blockage (*obstruction*). It is also called *pseudo-obstruction.* But when the intestines are examined, no obstruction is found. A problem in how the muscles and nerves in the intestines work causes the symptoms.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of this condition include:

- Cramps.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Fewer bowel movements than usual.
- Stomach pain.
- Bloating.
- Loose stools.

Over time, pseudo-obstruction can cause:

- Bacterial infections.
- Malnutrition.
- Muscle problems in other parts of the body.
- Some people also have bladder problems.

CAUSES

Diseases that affect muscles and nerves can cause similar symptoms. These diseases include:

- Lupus erythematosus.
- Scleroderma.
- Parkinson's disease.
- When a disease causes the symptoms, the condition is called secondary intestinal pseudo-obstruction.
- Medications that affect muscles and nerves might also cause secondary pseudo-obstruction. Examples include:
  - Opiates.
  - Antidepressants.

DIAGNOSIS

To diagnose the condition, your caregiver:

- Will take a complete medical history.
- Will do a physical exam.
- May take x-rays.

TREATMENT

The usual treatments are:

- Intravenous feeding (*nutritional support*). This will prevent malnutrition.
- Antibiotics. These are used to treat bacterial infections.
- Medication. This might also be given to treat intestinal muscle problems.
- In severe cases, surgery might be needed. It would be used to remove part of the intestine.

This information is courtesy of the National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse. The NIDDK is a service of the National Institute of Health.
You can learn more at digestive.niddk.nih.gov
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Document Released: 10/15/2010
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