Constipation in Children Over One Year of Age

Constipation is a change in a child's bowel habits. Constipation occurs when the stools are too hard, too infrequent, too painful, too large, or there is an inability to have a bowel movement at all.

SYMPTOMS

- Cramping with belly (*abdominal*) pain.
- Hard stool or painful bowel movements.
- Less than 1 stool in 3 days.
- Soiling of undergarments.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Check your child's bowel movements so you know what is normal for your child.
- If your child is toilet trained, have them sit on the toilet for 10 minutes following breakfast or until the bowels empty. Rest the child's feet on a stool for comfort.
- Do not show concern or frustration if your child is unsuccessful. Let the child leave the bathroom and try again later in the day.
- Include fruits, vegetables, bran, and whole grain cereals in the diet.
- A child must have fiber-rich foods with each meal.
- Encourage the intake of extra fluids between meals.
- Prunes or prune juice once daily may be helpful.
- Encourage your child to come in from play to use the bathroom if they have an urge to have a bowel movement. Use rewards to reinforce this.
- If your caregiver has given medication for your child's constipation, give this medication every day. You may have to adjust the amount given to allow your child to have 1 to 2 soft stools every day.
- To give added encouragement, reward your child for good results. This means doing a small favor for your child when they sit on the toilet for an adequate length (10 minutes) of time even if they have not had a bowel movement.
  - The reward may be any simple thing such as getting to watch a favorite TV show, giving a sticker or keeping a chart so the child may see their progress.
  - Using these methods, the child will develop their own schedule for good bowel habits.
- **Do not** give enemas, suppositories, or laxatives unless instructed by your child's caregiver.
- **Never** punish your child for soiling their pants or not having a bowel movement. This will only worsen the problem.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- There is bright red blood in the stool.
- The constipation continues for more than 4 days.
- There is abdominal or rectal pain along with the constipation.
- There is continued soiling of undergarments.
- You have any questions or concerns.

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