

Every person's bowel habits are unique; a daily bowel movement may not be the norm for everyone. Constipation refers to the character and consistency of the stool rather than the frequency of bowel movements. Stools that are small, hard, and dry characterize constipation. Children will withhold stools because of discomfort from hard stool. Stool collects in the rectum and makes it even more difficult to pass. As the rectum stretches, sensation will temporarily decrease. Thus, constipation becomes self-perpetuating and often more severe with time.

Things to Know about Children and Bathroom Time

1. A busy child may not take the time to go to the bathroom.
2. Make bathroom time relaxed and unhurried.
3. Keep special books in the bathroom for relaxation.
4. If away from home, a child may not use bathroom facilities because of unfamiliarity or lack of privacy.
5. Make sure that the bathroom is available for the child when he/she needs it. Discuss it with the teacher at school.

Helping Your Child Overcome Constipation

1. Dietary changes - increase water intake, high residue foods (green vegetables, fruits), whole grains and bran. Reduce intake of cheese and milk, which may be constipating. It has recently been suggested that changing to a soymilk may be helpful for severe constipation.
2. Retrain bowels. Encourage the child to sit on the toilet for 5-20 minutes after meals. If your child is a toddler and not completely toilet trained, put him/her back in diapers and eliminate all pressures.
3. Laxatives will alleviate the pain that the child associates with stooling and give the stretched rectum time to return to normal size. This type of laxative use will NOT cause laxative dependence.
 - Milk of Magnesia _____ tsp orally at bedtime
 - MiraLAX _____ capful in 6 ounces of fluid each day
4. Stool softeners are not laxatives. They work by pulling water into the bowel, preventing excessive drying of stool. They help the laxative do its job.
 - Benafiber _____ Tablespoon each day
5. The goal is 1-2 very soft bowel movements each day. You may need to increase or decrease the above interventions to achieve this goal.

Treatment for constipation may take 6 months to as long as 2-3 years.