

# Management of Constipation

## What is a normal bowel pattern?

- Bowel patterns vary from child to child.
- Most children have bowel movements 1-2 times per day. Other children may have bowel movements every 2-3 days.

## What is constipation?

- A very common problem in children and usually isn't a cause for concern. Healthy eating and exercise habits can help prevent it.
- Characterized by:
  - Having fewer than 2 bowel movements in a week
  - Having dry, hard, or difficult-to-pass stools
  - Feeling that some of the stool hasn't passed.

## Signs and Symptoms

- Stomachaches, cramping, and nausea
- Going less than usual
- Having trouble/straining or pain when going to the bathroom
- Feeling full or bloated
- Seeing a little blood on the toilet paper
- Some children with constipation may stain their underwear with bits of stool

## Causes

- Holding back or withholding stool – your child may not have a BM for different reasons (i.e., diaper rashes, don't want to stop playing, wanting to show they can decide things for themselves)
- Illnesses
- Diet – not consuming enough healthy foods from the 5 food groups
- Other changes – stressful situations, traveling, weather, etc.

## Prevention and Treatment

- **Give more liquids.** Drinking enough water and other liquids helps stool move more easily through the intestines.
  - The amount kids need varies by weight and age. Most school-aged kids need 3-4 glasses of water each day.
  - If your infant is constipated during the move from breast milk or to solid foods, try serving just a few ounces (2-4) of apple, pear, or prune juice each day.
  - If the constipation lasts or seems to bother your child, call your doctor to schedule a visit
- **Encourage more fiber.** High-fiber foods (such as fruits, vegetables, whole-grain bread) can help prevent constipation.
  - Fiber can't be digested, so it helps clean out the intestines by moving the bowels along.
  - A diet full of fatty, sugary, or starchy foods can slow the bowels down.
  - When you add more fiber to your child's diet, do so slowly over a few weeks and make sure child also drinks more liquids.
  - Fiber doesn't have to be a turn-off for kids. Try apples, pears, beans, oatmeal, oranges, ripe bananas, whole-grain breads, popcorn. Adding flax meal or bran to homemade fruit smoothies is another way to add fiber.
- **Encourage enough exercise.** Physical activity helps the bowels get into action, so encourage plenty of exercise each day, such as walking, playing catch, riding bikes, shooting hoops.
- **Develop a regular meal schedule.** Eating is a natural stimulant for the bowels, so regular meals may help kids develop routine bowel habits. If needed, schedule breakfast a little earlier to give you child a chance for a relaxed visit to the bathroom before school.
- **Get kids into the habit of going.** If your child fights the urge to go to the bathroom, have them sit on the toilet for at least 10 minutes at the same time each day (ideally, after a meal).

