

CONSTIPATION IN CHILDREN

Two of more of the following suggest diagnosis of constipation:

Less than 1 year old if:

- Fewer than three complete stools per week (this does not apply to exclusively breastfed babies after 6 weeks of age)
- Hard large stool +/- associated bleeding
- 'Rabbit droppings' (type 1 stool)
- Symptoms of distress or straining on stooling,

Greater than 1 year old if:

- Fewer than three complete stools per week
- Overflow soiling (commonly no form, very smelly, passes without sensation. Can also be thick and sticky or dry and flaky)
- 'Rabbit droppings'
- Large infrequent stools that block the toilet
- Defecation symptoms – retentive posturing, abdominal pain on passage of stool, anal pain
- Anal pain
- Painful bowel movements and bleeding associated with hard stools

Examine for Red Flags signs:

- **Abnormal appearance/position/patency of anus:** fistulae, bruising, multiple fissures, tight or patulous anus, anteriorly placed anus, absent anal wink
- **Gross abdominal distension**
- **Evidence of poor growth**
- **Abnormalities on spine / lumbosacral region/ gluteal examination:** asymmetry or flattening of the gluteal muscles, evidence of sacral agenesis, discoloured skin, naevi or sinus, hairy patch, lipoma, central pit (dimple that you can't see the bottom of), scoliosis
- **Deformity in lower limbs** such as talipes,
- **Abnormal neuromuscular signs** unexplained by any existing condition, such as cerebral palsy

Consider **faecal impaction in a child presenting with a combination of:**

- A history of severe symptoms of constipation
- The presence of overflow soiling
- Faecal mass palpable on abdominal examination

**Refer urgently to Paediatric Surgery if:
Paediatrics if:**

- Anatomical abnormality of anus
- History of delayed passage of meconium more than 36 hours
- Symptoms of constipation commencing in first 4 weeks of life not responding to simple measures and causing great distress
- Child under 1yr and not responded to optimum management within 4 weeks

Refer / Discuss with General

- Poor weight gain
- Developmental delay
- Failed maintenance treatment
- If under six months old
- Dis-impaction therapy is needed

MAINTENANCE TREATMENT

Ensure you have assessed all children for faecal impaction and commence maintenance therapy if dis-impaction is not indicated.

Advise parents that they will need to use a combination of medication, dietary changes and behavioural changes.

It may take many weeks of treatment before a regular soiling routine is established.

Follow up with their GP is appropriate.

Choice of laxative is dependent on availability, ease of taking for child, personal choice.

Behavioural changes

- Positive daily toileting routine (3-4 per day for 5-10 mins)
- Rewards
- Bowel diary
- Lots of praise and encouragement for the child

Dietary changes

- Increase fibre intake
- Adequate fluids (6-8 cups daily); fruit juice (prune, pear, apple)
- Avoid excessive milk intake (>1 pint) beyond infancy

Parental Advice Links

- [ERIC](#)
- 'Poo goes to pooland' interactive app

Movicol (paediatric plain sachets) OSMOTIC 1st line

6 months - 1yr 0.5-1 sachets daily

1-6 yrs - 1 sachet daily, adjust dose to produce soft painless stool (max 4 sachets daily)

7-11 yrs - 2 sachets daily, adjust dose to produce soft painless stool (max 4 sachets daily)

Movicol (adult)

12-18 yrs – 4 sachets on day 1, increased in steps of 2 sachets to max of 8 daily

Lactulose OSMOTIC (if movicol not tolerated)

1-12months 2.5ml twice daily

1 – 5yrs 2.5ml to 5ml twice a day

5-18yrs 5ml to 10ml twice a day



Senna syrup (7.5mg/5ml) STIMULANT 2nd line

1 month - 4yrs 2.5-10 mls once daily

4-18yrs - 2.5-20 mls once daily

DIS-IMPACTION THERAPY

Start at the lowest dose and increase the dose every few days.

Aiming for two soft form stools to be produced each day.

Educated parents to increase oral fluid intake to prevent dehydration.

MOVICOL (Paediatric plain sachets)

1-11 months half a sachet -> one sachet daily

1-5 yrs 2 sachets on day one -> 4 sachets for 2 days -> 6 sachets daily for 2 days -> 8 sachets daily

5-12 yrs 4 sachets on day one -> increase by 2 sachets daily to max of 12 sachets daily

MOVICOL (adult)

12-18 yrs 4 sachets on day 1 -> increase by 2 sachets daily to a max of 8 sachets daily.