

Where **kids** come first

When children become constipated



L'Hôpital de Montréal pour enfants
The Montreal Children's Hospital

Centre universitaire de santé McGill
McGill University Health Centre

Constipation is very common in children. It is not a disease and it can be treated. But the longer constipation goes unrecognized the less successful treatment is. Complications can also arise. It is best to recognize as early as possible that your child is constipated and to seek treatment right away.

What is constipation?

Constipation can be defined as:

- a decrease in frequency of bowel movements two or less times per week
- stools that are hard, dry and shaped like balls pebble-like stools. Even if this occurs daily
- stools that are painful and difficult to pass
- large stools that can block the toilet with or without soiling underwear.

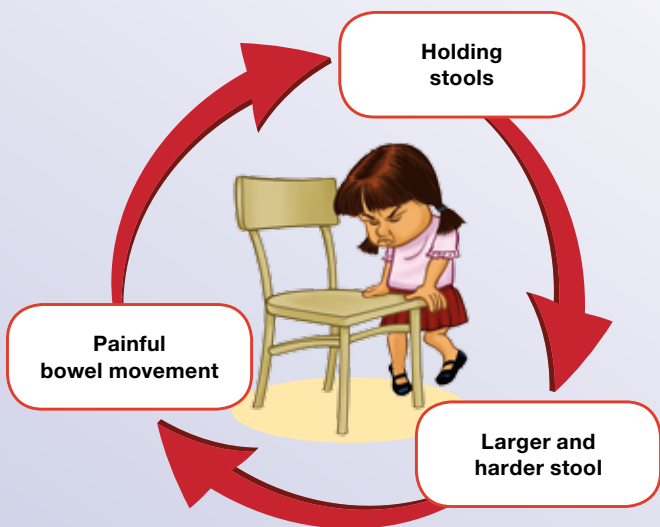
Symptoms of constipation

- painful bowel movements
- stomach pain/abdominal distention
- rectal bleeding from tears (fissures)
- poor appetite
- irritability/ crankiness
- urine problems (recurrent infections, bedwetting).

Common cause of constipation

The most common cause of constipation is functional (not due to an underlying disease). Functional constipation begins when a child has a painful bowel movement. The child then holds in the next bowel movement because of the pain he/she experienced before. This is known as “holding.”

Circle of Pain



SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD MAY BE HOLDING A BOWEL MOVEMENT

- it may look like your child is trying to push, however he/she is probably trying to hold the stool in
- hiding in a corner or holding on to furniture
- wriggling on the floor/unusual positions
- crossing legs
- body is stretched and clenched/up toes
- dancing back and forth from one leg to another
- may clench buttocks
- refusal to have a bowel movement
- fear of the toilet.

Possible causes of holding

- previous painful defecation
- toilet training
- stressful event
- changes in the diet/routine
- travel
- viral illness/gastro-enteritis
- bad diaper rash
- starting school/summer camp
- suppositories, enemas
- ignoring the urge to go for a bowel movement/ because the child is too busy
- toilet not available
- use of certain medications
- sexual abuse.

Treatment

There are different forms of treatment from behaviour modification to lifestyle changes to medication. You should discuss a treatment plan with your child's physician before trying any home remedies.



This information was prepared by the team in the Motility Lab of the Pediatric Gastroenterology Service of The Montreal Children's Hospital of the McGill University Health Centre.

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IMPORTANT : PLEASE READ

Information provided in this pamphlet is for educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice or instruction of a professional healthcare practitioner, or to substitute medical care. Contact a qualified healthcare practitioner if you have any questions concerning your care.