

Constipation in infants and young children

Normal Bowel Habits:

- During the first three months of life in breast fed infants varies widely, with an average of ~3 soft bowel movements/day but some will stool after every feed, and others once a week.
- Most formula fed infants have 2-3 bowel movements per day, but can vary on formula. Some soy and cow's milk based formulas cause harder bowel movements.
- By two years of age, a child typically has one to two formed (but not hard) stools daily.

Abnormal Bowel Habits:

- Infants who have hard or pellet-like stools, and seem uncomfortable crying while passing these hard stools.
- Infants can be a bit dramatic with stooling—grunting, briefly turning red in the face, arching....this is not unusual.
- If your infant is repeatedly straining to have a bowel movement without success, you can help by bending his/her hips and legs up towards the abdomen to relax the pelvic muscles.
- Abnormal bowels can also be determined by comparing to his/her normal routine. For example, a child who normally has a bowel movement every two days is not constipated as long as it is soft and not difficult/painful to pass.
- Painful bowel movements can cause maladaptive behavior, causing young children to withhold (avoid going) bowels in order to avoid more pain. Helping these children regain normal bowel routine with soft stools is very important.

Important factors for consistent stooling include:

Infants 0-4 mo of age:

- Consideration of formula or milk changes (some kids struggle with transition to cow's milk)
- Healthy gut flora (children's probiotic can be helpful)

4-9 mo:

- Fiber rich foods (Cereals: barley cereal better than rice cereal. Pureed fruits/veggies: apricot, pears, sweet potato, peaches, plums, beans, peas, broccoli. Juice: 2 oz/day prune, apple, or pear juice)

9 mo and older:

- Adequate hydration—add water (can add 2-3 oz/day prune, apple, or pear juice...but caution to avoid more as this can form bad habits, with too much sugar into daily routine).
- Healthy dietary omega-3 fats (avocado, olive oil, nut butters, etc)

"Power Pudding": A natural safe recipe for infants and children >4 mo of age

- 1) Soak 1 cup dry prunes in water (can take a few hours)
- 2) Pour 1/3 cup prune juice into blender
- 3) Add softened prunes to prune juice and puree until prunes are dissolved
- 4) Add 1/3 cup applesauce to blender (I recommend without added sugar)
- 5) Add 3 Tablespoons bran cereal to blender
- 6) Refrigerate and use the pudding for about one week
- 7) Use ~1/2 Tablespoon power pudding every day, can advance to 1 Tablespoon if needed

Stool impaction....not so much fun, and approach with caution. Don't hesitate to call your physician!

- Can use OTC Glycerine suppository and/or gentle rectal stimulation with tip of rectal thermometer, but this is not a tool that she be used regularly nor frequently.

If constipation becomes a recurrent issue, and is persistent despite dietary suggestions above, you can use Mirilax OTC safely.

- Recommend titrating least affective dose to retrain routine bowel habits (can be particularly helpful for kids that might be with-holding stool due to fear of painful bowel movements!).
- Recommend use of 2 grams mirilax powder in bottle daily to start
- Can titrate up each day by 2 grams up to 8 grams/day to achieve regular soft stools every 1-2 days.

-Once regular for 2-4 wks, can slowly titrate dose down to the least affective dose in helping maintain consistency.....then back off!