

JONATHAN A. BENJAMIN, M.D.
ROGER W. SPINGARN, M.D.
ELISSA ROTTENBERG, M.D.
KATHLEEN M. CARUSO, P.A.-C
ELIZABETH GRAVES-WITHERELL, P.A.-C
1400 CENTRE STREET, SUITE 203
NEWTON CENTRE, MASSACHUSETTS 02459

TELEPHONE (617) 244-9929
FAX (617) 244-9935

CONSTIPATION IN OLDER CHILDREN, (e.g. ≥ 2 years)

It is not necessary to have a bowel movement every day. Having a bowel movement less frequently can be normal for children and adults, however most children stool at least every other day. Stools should be neither hard nor difficult to pass. That is, stool **consistency** and its associated **symptoms**, defines constipation. This is important because when stools are hard, children often withhold.

Several factors contribute to becoming constipated. To alleviate the symptoms of constipation and to help prevent it, we suggest:

- 1) **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY:** this is extremely important. Think: athletes (as opposed to *couch potatoes*) are less likely to become constipated.
- 2) **FLUIDS:** Stools are formed in the large intestine; when they remain there for an extended period, water is lost and stools begin to harden. To counter the drying effect, it is important to **drink plenty of fluids**.

Water is a terrific fluid. Drinking at least a cupful with every meal can be beneficial. Sometimes other fluids, such as prune or pear juice, can be helpful for short periods.

- 3) **DIET:** Foods containing **high fiber content** are helpful. Roughage helps move waste products through the gastrointestinal tract because it is neither digested nor absorbed. Hence, stools have less time to harden.

Fresh fruits: (the "Ps:") peaches, pears, plums, papayas, pineapple, other raw fruits

Dried fruits: prunes, apricots, dates, figs, raisins

Vegetables: carrots, lettuce, tomatoes, zucchini, squash, cauliflower, celery, cucumbers, broccoli, sprouts, and especially the skins of fruits and vegetables (e.g. baked potatoes)

Whole grain foods: bran muffins, sprouted wheat/rye bread, whole grain crackers, granola

- 4) **BEHAVIOR:** Many children find that that they are *too busy* to stool; sitting on the toilet for them is not a priority, particularly if they are in school. For others, stooling has become painful and is an activity they want to avoid. When these behaviors result in constipation, it *is* important to promote **daily toileting** so that stools do not have a chance to become hard and painful to pass. Encourage your child to sit on the toilet *at the same time* every day for at least 10 minutes. Your child may help negotiate the best period that is free from '*more important activities*,' or you can encourage a time when he or she typically stools, such as after a meal.

(Special care must be used with some children so that toileting does not become an issue of control. If necessary, reward young children for *just sitting* on the toilet. This will encourage the behavior that will relieve their symptoms. Try *not* to grapple; it never helps and will only increase your child's resistance to toileting.)

Please discuss this with us if you have questions or concerns.