

Constipation



Constipation is when you can't pass solid waste, or **stool**. (Passing stool is also called "having a **bowel movement**.") Constipation is *not* usually serious. Here are some reasons for constipation:

- Your child has the flu or some other sickness.
- Your child isn't getting enough water.
- Your child is holding in the bowel movement because he or she:
 - Has a bad diaper rash.
 - Has a tear in the **rectum** (the opening where stool comes out).
 - Is being toilet trained.

Sometimes a child won't have a bowel movement for many days. They may start getting stains in their underpants. This is called "soiling." It is a sign of a bigger problem.

You can do things to help your child's stool be softer. This makes it easier to pass. (See the Self-Care Tips on next page in this section.) *Don't* give your child a **laxative** or an enema unless the doctor tells you to. (Laxatives and enemas are medicines for constipation.) Your child *doesn't* have to pass stool every day.

Questions to Ask

With constipation, does your child have any of these problems?

- Blood in the **stool**.
- A crack or tear in the **rectum** (the opening where stool comes out).
- Pain with a **bowel movement**.
- Throwing up.

YES



NO

Is your baby less than 2 weeks old and is he or she not passing stool?

YES



NO

Has your child:

- Gone for more than 4 days without passing stool?
- Been constipated since he or she was born or for more than 4 weeks?
- Had constipation 3 or more times without the flu or any other sickness?

YES



NO

Is your child leaking and "soiling" his or her clothes?

YES



NO



See Self-Care on next page



Self-Care Tips

- Give your child lots of water and other things to drink. (This is very important when the weather is hot.)
- Give your child prune juice.
- To help your baby pass stool, lie the baby on his or her back. Move the baby's legs like he or she is riding a bicycle. Or bend your baby's legs at the knees and hold them up to your baby's chest.
- Feed your child foods with fiber:

- Babies 6 months old and older can have whole wheat baby cereal.
- Older children can eat fruit, and whole-wheat breads and cereals, and vegetables.



- Try giving your baby light Karo[®] syrup. (You can get it at the grocery store.) Here's how to give it to your baby:

- Put $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of syrup in 4 ounces of water.

OR

- Put $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of syrup in 4 ounces of formula.

- *Don't* give honey to an infant.

Note: You may have to give your child an **over-the-counter** medicine. Be sure to check with the doctor first. Some medicines are:

- Mineral oil. (*Don't* give mineral oil to a child under 3 years old.)
- Glycerin **suppositories**.
- **Laxatives** like Colace[®] or Metamucil[®].