CONSTITUTION

 Constipation is a change from the normal bowel habit which causes discomfort, or pain, and the stools may be of a harder consistency. Some children with long-term constipation may have a problem with soiling. This is caused by overflow of fluid, or semi-solid stools, around the solid faeces in the rectum. The child cannot control the soiling or smearing of underclothes.

 Constipation may be associated with one or more factors.

 These could include:

 • Ignoring the signal to empty the bowel
 • Low fluid intake
 • Low fibre diet
 • Psychological influences, for example, concern about using school toilets, relationship problems, etc.
 • Fear of passing painful stools (poo)
 • Fear of potty or toilet
 • Family bowel habits
 • Lack of exercise

 SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CHILDHOOD CONSTIPATION

 The child may have one, or a combination of the following symptoms:

 • Poor appetite
 • Lack of energy
 • Irregular bowel activity
 • Occasionally passing very large stools
 • Foul smelling wind/stools
 • Hard or runny stools
 • Straining to stop and start the passage of stools
 • Bed or daytime wetting
 • Mood changes/irritability

 If the constipation is left untreated it could lead to:

 • Low mood/irritability
 • Sore bottom
 • Discomfort/pain
 • Embarrassment/passing wind
 • Headaches and tiredness
 • Soiling or smearing of underclothes

 If constipation continues over several months, the bowel may become stretched and muscles weakened. Children will therefore lose the normal urge to open their bowels.

 TREATMENT OF CHILDHOOD CONSTIPATION

 Having a healthy, regular bowel means that your child is more likely to have a normal, stress-free, happy life. To reduce the chance of constipation and to have a healthy bowel, your child should:

 • Drink plenty of fluids, especially water
 • Increase fibre in the diet*
 • Exercise regularly, e.g., walk to school, swimming, etc.
 • Allow sufficient time for regular toileting
 • Have access to clean and pleasant toilet facilities

 *FOODS RICH IN FIBRE INCLUDE

 Cereals e.g.,
 Weetabix, Bran flakes, Shredded Wheat
 Wholemeal bread
 Wholemeal pasta, Brown rice
 Fruit and vegetables (fresh, frozen, or dried) wash but leave the skin on where possible
 Pulses e.g., Baked beans, peas, kidney beans

 Cut down on the intake of sweets, biscuits and cakes, which fill the child, but reduce their appetite for healthy foods and may promote constipation if eaten in excess.
If constipation is suspected and persists for more than four or five days, or if your child complains of severe discomfort, then you should seek help from either:

- Your Doctor
- School nurse
- Community Nurse for children and families
- Health Visitor
- Pharmacist

Treatment from a doctor may be necessary to prevent the bowel becoming stretched and weakened and help establish a healthy bowel habit.

**THINGS TO CHECK BEFORE YOUR CHILD STARTS SCHOOL**

- Availability/condition of school toilets
- Bowel action fits in with school life
- Wiping techniques are mastered


Medical Information Unit
Reckitt Benckiser Healthcare UK Ltd.,
Dansom Lane, Hull HU8 7DS
Tel: (Freephone) 0500 455456

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