

# MYRTLE AVENUE Pediatrics



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## CONSTIPATION

- Painful passage of bowel movements is the most reliable sign.
- Inability to pass stools even though the urge to go is present.
- Infrequent bowel movements. Example: Going 4 or more days without stooling. Exception: Exclusively breastfed infants around 2 months of age often pass large, soft BMs at infrequent intervals (up to 7 days) without pain.

### Common Misconceptions

- Some people normally have large, hard BMs daily **without** pain. This is **NOT** constipation.
- Babies less than 6 months of age commonly, grunt, push, strain, draw up the legs and become flushed while stooling. However, they do not cry. These behaviors are normal, reminding us that it is difficult to have a bowel movement while lying down.

### Causes of Constipation

- Low fiber diet
- Excess dairy intake
- Repeatedly waiting too long to go to the bathroom (holding it).
- Withholding stool due to the memory of passing painful stool in the past.
- Too much pressure during toilet training

### Expected Course

- Dietary changes relieve **most** constipation
- Trauma to the anal canal during constipation **may** cause an anal fissure (small tear). It is not uncommon to find a small amount of bright red blood on the toilet paper. This heals spontaneously.

## **Dietary Treatment**

### Infants Less than 1 Year Old

- 1-2 ounces of Pedialyte or fruit juice (pear or prune) twice a day
- After 4 months of age, add high fiber foods like **oatmeal cereal, apricots, pears, prunes, peaches, plums, beans or peas.**
- **AVOID** carrots, squash, bananas and apples.

### Older Children (Over 1 Year Old)

- Fruits or vegetables 3 times a day (raw, unpeeled are best). **Prunes, figs, dates, raisins, peaches, pears, apricots, beans, peas, cauliflower, broccoli & cabbage.**
- Increase bran which is a natural stool softener. The new “**natural**” cereals, **bran flakes, bran muffins, shredded wheat, graham crackers, oatmeal, high fiber cookies, brown rice, whole wheat bread & popcorn.**
- Increase the amount of water.

## **Behavioral Modifications**

- Encourage a regular bowl pattern by having the child sit on the toilet for a few minutes after meals, especially after dinner.
- If constipation coincides with toilet training, back off and go back to diapers/pull ups.

## **Medicines**

### Stool Softeners

- Used **only** if dietary changes do not relieve the constipation.
- Give daily at dinnertime for 1 week.
- They take 8 to 12 hours to work
- These are **NOT** laxatives and are **NOT** habit forming.
- Examples include: Milk of Magnesia, Metamucil, Citrucel, and Mineral Oil. Daily dose is usually between 1 tsp and 1Tbsp.
- Miralax is a powdered laxative that can be mixed with water, juice or milk.

### Enemas

- Used **ONLY** for acute constipation where the need for relief is immediate.
- Use **ONLY** under the directions of a doctor
- Examples include: Glycerin suppository, gentle rectal dilation with a lubricated gloved finger or a thermometer.

## **Common Mistakes**

- Using suppositories or enemas without your doctor’s advice. These can actually irritate the anus causing more pain and stool holding.
- Giving strong oral laxatives which can cause cramping and can be potentially habit forming.

