

Constipation in Childhood

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DEFINITIONS

- Constipation - pain, difficulty or delay in defaecation
- Soiling - involuntary passage of liquid stool. Disastrous in school age children
- Encopresis - passage of faeces in inappropriate places. Underlying psychological problems need tackling; most secondary to underlying constipation

Constipation: Signs & Symptoms

- Poorly recognised
- Abdominal pain, distension or discomfort
- Poor appetite, lack of energy, malaise
- Mood Change - unhappy, angry or irritable mood
- Painful defecation - withholding behaviours to prevent passage of painful stools may be confused with straining to pass stools. Pre school child due to anxiety or fear quickly learns to withhold. Potty training can provoke

CORRECT DIAGNOSIS

- Neonatal/infant - exclude Hirschsprung's
- Childhood - urinary incontinence
- palpate abdomen, inspect anus & sacrum, noPR
- abdominal Xray
- psychological factors

PREVENTION

- ↑ non milk fluid intake
- avoid xs cows milk in older infants
- beware overdoing toilet training
- Plenty of roughage but in under 5s – may not digest, cannot force

IMPORTANCE IN CHILDHOOD

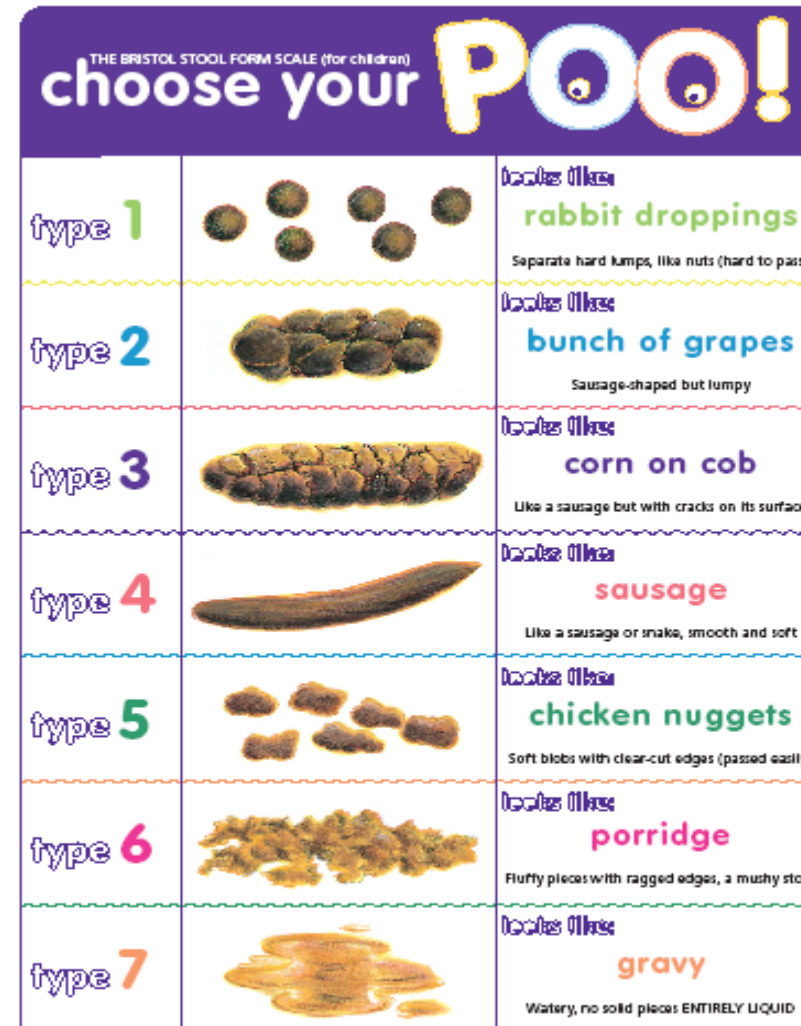
- Pre-school; fear and avoidance of defaecation with associated intra-family stress
- Early infancy: beware partial intestinal obstruction → ↑ risk of enterocolitis & bowel perforation
- School age – overflow incontinence can be socially disastrous

Constipation: Investigations

- Blood
 - TFT and Coeliac antibodies - in intractable constipation
- Radiography
 - Plain abdominal X-Ray
 - Transit studies
- Rectal biopsy
 - Delayed passage of meconium (more than 48 hours after birth in term babies)
 - Constipation in first 4 weeks of life
 - Chronic abdominal distension plus vomiting
 - Family history of Hirschsprung's disease
 - Faltering growth IN ADDITION to any of the previous features.

Constipation: Treatment

- Stool softeners
 - Movicol
 - Lactulose
- Colonic stimulants
 - Picosulphate
 - Senna
- Bowel clearout
 - Klean prep via n/g tube or Movicol orally
 - Enemas not phosphate
 - Irrigation systems for rectal hold up with distension
- Surgery- manual evacuation, ACE procedure



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MOVICOL[®] Paediatric Plain
 Methylcellulose, polyethylene glycol, polyethylene glycol

CLEAR OUT

- **Soften stool – Movicol or docusate**
- **may take 2 - 3 wks & ↑soiling**
- **Add stimulant laxative eg senna, picolax – 3 or more days after starting softeners**
- **If megarectum or colon, no senna until retained stools passed**
- **Kleen-Prep - via n/g tube or Movicol po – superseded Lactulose as softener**

- **? enemas NOT in 3-10 yr olds**
- **docusate**
- **microlax v relaxit**
- **bisacodyl**
- **phosphate enemas**
- **olive oil**
- **manual evacuation - rarely**

MAINTENANCE

- **Osmotic & stimulant laxative - > 1yr**
- **Advice about ↑ bran & fibre**
- **Bulking agents - fybogel, methyl cellulose NOT < 5yr**
- **osmotic agents – lactulose (rarely used) Movicol**
- **stimulants - docusate, sodium picosulphate, bisacodyl (tabs or supp), senna**
- **Regular OPD contact, CCN**
- **Psychological support - encouragement, star charts, financial awards**

