

# CHRONIC CONSTIPATION

Constipation occurs when stool accumulates, hardens, blocks up, and/or is difficult to expel which may lead to 3 + days between bowel movements. Chronic constipation leads to an enlarged colon and further constipative issues.

There is a higher incidence among those with developmental disabilities, affecting up to 74% of those with neuro-developmental disabilities.

The stomach releases partially digested food and fluids into the small intestine for further digestion. This thick liquid material, stool passes through the small intestine where further digestion takes place before entering the large intestine. Here liquids are absorbed and some further ingestion takes place sometimes forming gas. The stool accumulates till the last segment of large intestine fills then spills into the rectum creating the urge to defecate.

## Risk Factors:

- ❑ Hirschsprung Disease
- ❑ Cerebral Palsy
- ❑ Muscular Dystrophy
- ❑ Spina Bifida
- ❑ Psychiatric Disorders
- ❑ Hypothyroidism

## Signs and Symptoms:

- ❑ Abdominal pain
- ❑ Difficult or painful stools
- ❑ Hardened stool that blocks the passage of further stool (impaction)
- ❑ Decreased amount of stool passes
- ❑ Infrequent bowel movements (LESS THAN 3-5 TIMES A WEEK)
- ❑ Loose stool, watery diarrhea around point of impaction
- ❑ Loss of appetite
- ❑ Nausea/Vomiting (if serious obstruction)
- ❑ Bloating
- ❑ Visible abdominal distension
- ❑ Hard Abdomen
- ❑ Increase self-injurious behavior
- ❑ Sleepiness or fussiness

Tests of bowel function may be necessary. If ordered be sure to receive full instructions regarding preparation for these tests.

Prevention and treatment:

- Encourage fluid intake of 6-8 glasses of non caffeine fluids a day (unless on fluid restriction)
- Encourage a diet rich in fiber (Doctor and dietician directed)
- Encourage regular exercise
- May need to establish a bowel elimination plan
- Treat voluntary muscle disorders
- Teach proper posture for elimination (sitting with thighs flexed toward abdomen)
- Bowel elimination record indicates “normal” and abnormal
- May need preventive medication (Doctor directed)- stool softeners, mild laxatives...
- May need to encourage drinking warm fluids before eating