

Constipation with Cystic Fibrosis (CF)

Constipation is a common problem in people with cystic fibrosis. Constipation is when:

- The stool (poop) is hard to pass.
- There is less stooling than normal.
- The stools are smaller than normal.
- There may be frequent stomach aches.

If you are concerned about constipation, you should call your CF doctor or CF nurse.

What causes it?

Constipation can be caused by:

- Thick sticky mucus lining the intestinal wall.
- Not enough liquid in the diet.
- Too much caffeine.
- “Holding” stool.
- Changes in routine or stress, such as traveling, starting school, or starting a new job.
- Missing enzymes or taking too few enzymes.
- Fever, illness, or dehydration.
- Hot weather.
- Not enough fiber in the diet.



What are the common symptoms?



- Feeling the urge to pass stool, but not being able to.
- Cramps.
- Bloating and gas.
- Decreased appetite.
- Stool leakage / soiling.
- Nausea.
- Diarrhea mixed with pieces of formed stool.
- Alternating formed and liquid bowel movements.
- Hard, dry or large, wide stools.

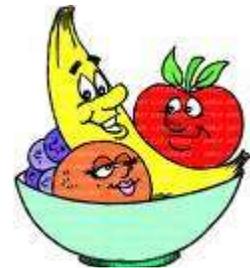
How is it diagnosed?

You'll be asked about your symptoms, diet, health, and daily routine. An x-ray may be done before treatment is started. A second x-ray may be needed to make sure the constipation has improved after treatment.

How is it treated?

The doctor can talk to you about treatment options. You may need to:

- Empty the bowel (colon). A medicine called polyethylene glycol (Miralax®) may be used. You may feel better after passing one or more larger stools, but there is still a lot more to pass. Your CF team will guide you.
- To clean the colon: Use a pitcher to mix ____ capful(s) of polyethylene glycol with ____ ounces of water, juice, or sports drink.
 - Drink ____ ounces in 10 minutes. Repeat ____ times every 30 to 60 minutes. The constipation may have cleared when you start passing only liquid stool with no pieces. If you have finished the amount of mix prescribed above and still are passing solid stools, call your CF care provider for more instructions.
- For daily use: Mix ____ capful(s) of polyethylene glycol with ____ ounces of water, juice or sports drink. Drink this mix within 10 minutes ____ time(s) a day. Continue taking it to prevent constipation from happening again.
- Eat more fiber. Fiber is found in most whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. It adds bulk and absorbs water to soften stool. This helps stool pass through the colon more easily.
- Drink more liquids. Drinking water and fruit juice can help soften stool. Avoid caffeine. It can be dehydrating.
- Be active. Moving around and exercising can help the colon work better and ease constipation.



ALERT: Call your CF team if you have any concerns or if your child:

- Has no stool or very little stool for 24 hours.
- Is vomiting.
- Has constipation that is getting worse.
- Has severe cramps.
- Has special health care needs not covered by this information.

Cystic Fibrosis Center

Children's Hospital of Wisconsin

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This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.