

Diarrhoea and constipation

Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea is the passing of loose or watery stools (poo). Due to the large amount of fluid that can be lost with diarrhoea it can quickly lead to dehydration. Diarrhoea can be caused by infection, antibiotics or by chemotherapy.

Causes:

- Chemotherapy drugs including Cytarabine
- Radiotherapy
- Other medicines such as antibiotics
- Surgery
- Infection

Symptoms:

- Cramping and tummy pain
- Feeling sick
- Needing to go to the toilet urgently
- Bloating feeling in tummy
- Blood or mucous in stools

If your child's bottom becomes sore as a result of diarrhoea, the following might be helpful:

- Do not use alcohol based or scented baby wipes – use water based products only
- Change nappies more frequently than usual
- Encourage older children to keep the area clean and dry
- Use generous amounts of barrier cream such as Sudocrem or Metanium
- If skin becomes broken or blistered, seek medical advice from your local hospital.

Occasionally, your child may develop an ulcer or anal tear which may cause severe infection and must therefore be reported to your local hospital immediately for treatment.

Constipation

Constipation is caused when stools are not passed regularly. Constipation is described as difficulty, delay or discomfort in opening the bowels.

Causes:

- Chemotherapy drugs including Vincristine
- Pain relief including Morphine
- Poor diet – lack of fibre
- Poor fluid intake
- Lack of exercise/mobility
- Anti sickness drugs, such as Ondansetron

Symptoms:

- Passing small hard pellets or large hard stools
- Pain when trying to go to the toilet
- Abdominal pain, bloating and wind
- Nausea and lack of appetite
- Headache, lethargy, bad breath

Treatment

- Drink plenty of water (six to eight glasses a day)
- Eat a balanced diet including carbohydrates, proteins, fruit and vegetables
- Avoid 'junk' food and cut down on sugar in drinks and sweets
- Laxatives (stool softeners and stimulants) may be prescribed for constipation.

Please speak to your doctor, nurse or community nurse if you think either diarrhoea or constipation may be a problem.