

CONSTIPATION IN CHILDREN CAUSES, PREVENTION, AND TREATMENT

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Abstract

This article analyzes the problem of constipation, which is widely prevalent among children, including its main etiological factors, clinical manifestations, and types. The relationship between constipation and improper nutrition, dehydration, insufficient physical activity, psychological factors, and certain medical conditions is discussed. In addition, the complications of the disease, preventive measures, and treatment approaches are reviewed. The article emphasizes the importance of a balanced diet, adequate fluid intake, and regular physical activity in maintaining healthy bowel function in children.

Keywords

constipation in children, pediatric constipation, dietary factors, intestinal peristalsis, dehydration, physical activity, psychological factors, chronic constipation, intestinal health, prevention

Introduction

Constipation is one of the most common gastrointestinal disorders in children. It is characterized by infrequent, difficult, painful, or insufficient bowel movements. Pediatric constipation is widely prevalent and may be associated with daily dietary habits, dehydration, psychological factors, insufficient physical activity, and certain diseases.

Timely treatment of constipation is crucial, as prolonged constipation may lead to intestinal dilation, hemorrhoids, and damage to the intestinal mucosa.

1. Causes of Constipation in Children

1.1. Nutrition-related causes Insufficient dietary fiber intake - inadequate consumption of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains slows intestinal motility. Dehydration - insufficient fluid intake results in hard and difficult stools. High consumption of sugary, fatty, and fast-food products - disrupts gastrointestinal function and alters intestinal microflora.

1.2. Lack of physical activity Insufficient physical activity leads to decreased intestinal peristalsis. Prolonged screen time negatively affects bowel function.

1.3. Psychological factors Stress, sleep deprivation, and adaptation to a new environment may contribute to the development of constipation.

1.4. Medical causes Hypothyroidism - reduced thyroid function slows intestinal motility. Genetic disorders associated with constipation, such as Hirschsprung disease. Medications - certain drugs (e.g., antacids and some analgesics) may cause constipation.

2. Clinical Manifestations of Constipation

The main signs of constipation in children include:

- Reduced frequency of bowel movements (less than twice per week);
- Hard, dry, and painful stools;
- Abdominal pain complaints;
- Digestive discomfort;
- Abdominal bloating and gas accumulation;
- Sleep disturbances and mood changes.

3. Types of Constipation

Acute constipation - short-term, usually associated with dietary changes or psychological factors.

Chronic constipation - persists for more than two weeks and is often related to improper nutrition, dehydration, or underlying medical conditions.

4. Complications of Constipation

- Abdominal distension and discomfort leading to reduced physical activity;
- Hemorrhoids and mucosal injury caused by hard stools;
- Increased risk of infections due to disrupted intestinal microflora;
- Psychological impact, including stress and sleep disturbances.

5. Prevention of Constipation

5.1. Healthy nutrition Adequate intake of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, and sufficient water (1–1.5 liters per day depending on age). Limitation of sugar and fat intake by reducing snacks, sweets, and fast food.

5.2. Physical activity Engaging children in at least 30–60 minutes of daily physical activity, including games, sports, and walking.

5.3. Establishment of proper defecation habits Setting a regular time for bowel movements (e.g., in the morning). Using a footstool to ensure a comfortable sitting position.

5.4. Psychological support Reducing stress and providing patience and support during adaptation to new environments.

Treatment of Constipation Correction of diet and hydration remains the most effective primary approach. Prebiotics and probiotics support intestinal microflora. Laxatives should be used only under medical supervision to soften stools and facilitate bowel movements. Massage and physical exercises, including abdominal massage, stimulate intestinal motility. Medical treatment is required in cases of genetic disorders or thyroid dysfunction.

Home Care Measures Ensure adequate fluid intake, promote healthy eating habits, limit snacks and sweets, encourage daily physical activity, establish regular bowel routines, and use abdominal massage and warm baths.

When to Consult a Doctor Medical consultation is necessary if bowel movements do not occur for more than one week, stools are hard or blood-stained, the child experiences persistent abdominal pain, or constipation is accompanied by vomiting, fever, or other symptoms.

Conclusion Constipation in children is a common condition that can be effectively prevented through proper nutrition, adequate hydration, physical activity, and psychological support. In cases of chronic constipation, medical consultation and specialized treatment are required. Healthy bowel function supports not only gastrointestinal health but also overall development and immune function in children.

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