



Patient Presentation

Constipation is common in childhood, especially in those who have limited mobility due to disability or other causes. Despite many possible diagnoses, at least 90% of affected children have functional constipation.

Symptoms include:

- Difficulty or straining when passing stools
- Passing stools less frequently than normal



Constipation (paediatric)

Quick Reference Guide

Access the [full KPP](#) for further information

'Red Flag' Signs & Symptoms

Does the patient present with the following?

- Onset of constipation from birth / first few weeks of life
- Failure to pass meconium (> 48 hours after birth)
- **Abdominal distension**: severe or if present with [vomiting](#)
- Evidence of [poor / faltering growth](#)
- Persistent [blood in stool](#)
- Spinal or neurological abnormality
- Abnormal appearance / position / patency of anus
- Deformity in lower limbs such as talipes



Investigations

- Not indicated in evaluating for functional constipation

In cases of refractory constipation +/- [faltering growth](#) / [short stature](#), consider thyroid function tests and coeliac screen

Treatment Approach

- Maintenance therapy:
 - Polyethylene glycol 3350 plus electrolytes ([macrogol 3350 with potassium chloride, sodium bicarbonate and sodium chloride](#))
 - Add a stimulant laxative if polyethylene glycol 3350 plus electrolytes **does not work**
 - Substitute a stimulant laxative if the child **does not** tolerate polyethylene glycol 3350 plus electrolytes
 - Continue medication at maintenance dose for several weeks after regular bowel habit is established
 - Laxative therapy may be required for several years
- Disimpaction can be initiated in primary care

Refer if symptoms persist, or if refractory constipation

Consider escalation of care to the Emergency Department or Specialist Practitioner if required

Follow local protocols



Safety Netting Advice

- Do not use dietary interventions alone as first-line treatment for idiopathic constipation
- Diet should include adequate fluid intake / fibre, including foods with a high fibre content

Seek medical attention if:

- 'Red Flag' signs or symptoms develop



Resources

Further information for the public:

- [NICE clinical guideline CG99](#)
- [Constipation](#), the NHS website
- [ERIC](#), The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity
- [Bladder & Bowel UK](#)



Related KPPs

- [Abdominal Distension](#)
- [Abdominal Pain](#)