

Constipation After Surgery

The pain medicine given to your child after surgery can cause constipation. Each child is different, but a child can be considered constipated if they do not have at least one bowel movement each day. To prevent this problem, try these suggestions:

- Give your child plenty of liquids to drink. Juice and water are both good choices. Water has no calories so it is a good choice. Apple, prune and grape juices give some extra help to some children.
- Have your child eat lots of fruits and vegetables. High-fiber fruits such as cherries, prunes, pears and raisins are excellent. Some high-fiber vegetables are beans, peas, celery and broccoli.
- Increase bran. Offer foods such as graham crackers, granola, bran muffins and shredded wheat, which are high in bran. Older children may have popcorn. Fibercon cookies are another great source of bran and are found at some drug stores.
- Offer sugar-free or diet gummy bear candies, which contain sweeteners like sorbitol and maltitol that are not absorbed in the body. Sugar-free or diet gummy bears act like a laxative for children. Only sugar-free and diet gummy bears work in this way, not regular gummy bears.
- Have your child get moving as soon as they can. Activity like being up and about or walking can help get their bowels moving.

Do stool softeners help?

Making the changes to your child's diet that are suggested above often helps with constipation. Stool softeners are prescribed for some children following surgery. Please ask the doctor to prescribe a stool softener before leaving the hospital if your child has a problem with constipation. Remember that your child will need to drink lots of liquids for the stool softener to work.

Glycerin suppositories found at most drug stores can also be used to treat constipation.

When should I call the doctor?

If your child does not have a bowel movement within 4 to 5 days following surgery, please call your primary medical doctor, nurse or surgery clinic for advice.

To Learn More

- Orthopedics
206-987-2109
- General Surgery
206-987-0237
- Urology
206-987-2509
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201. This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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