

### Advice Note: Constipation

Dear GP,

Thank you for your referral for this child with constipation. This is a very common problem in children and organic causes are very rare.

**Please refer to the healthpathway for constipation in children for assessment and management of children with this problem.**  
**<https://3d.healthpathways.org.nz/index.htm>**

Key points include:

- **Assessment :**
  - After taking appropriate history, perform examination including :
    - Abdominal examination
    - Inspection of anus, especially in infants
    - Spine and lower limb neurology
  - Investigations, including blood tests or imaging, are not routinely indicated and should only be requested if appropriate treatment is ineffective
  
- **Management :**
  - Education and reassurance – see healthpathway for resources for the family
  - Disimpaction (if required) followed by regular laxatives for a prolonged period– **see healthpathways for appropriate doses of laxatives in children** . Most commonly used laxatives include:
    - Lactulose – usual dose 2- 3ml/kg/day
    - Macrogol
      - initially up to 4 sach / day in up to 6 year olds for disimpaction
      - Initially up to 6 sach/day in 6-12 year olds for disimpaction
      - Initially up to 8 sach/day in >12 year olds for disimpaction,
      - reduced to a regular dose to achieve 1-2 soft bowel motions a day
  - Dietary advice including fluid intake
  - Behavioral component with regular routine of sitting on the toilet at least twice a day for at least 5 minutes with appropriate rewards

**Please do not hesitate to re-refer to Paediatrics if:**

- Suspected organic cause
  - please explain in the referral why you suspect this to help us prioritize your referral
- Fecal impaction which has not responded to appropriate disimpaction regimen as per healthpathways
  - please document the doses of laxatives used in the referral as **the most common cause for failure of treatment is inadequate dosing**
- The child has been receiving adequate doses of medication but treatment is not effective:
  - Please document the doses of laxatives used

Kind regards,

*Hutt Paediatric Team*