Stimulant laxatives for children with constipation

Information for parents and carers
What are stimulant laxatives?
Stimulant laxatives are medicines used to increase the frequency and ease of bowel movements.

What do stimulant laxatives do?
Stimulant laxatives activate the nerves in the large intestine. This increases the contraction of muscles in the large intestine, causing them to squeeze harder than usual. This pushes the stool along and out more efficiently.

What are stimulant laxatives used for?
Stimulant laxatives are used to treat constipation (a build-up of stool within the large bowel). They stimulate full emptying of the bowel and can help your child to get back into a regular bowel habit.

How does my child take stimulant laxatives?
There are different stimulant laxatives available; senna, sodium picosulphate and bisacodyl are the most commonly used. They are usually given once a day and can come in either liquid or tablet form.

Which medicine should we use and how much should I give my child?
The correct medicine and dose for your child will be calculated and prescribed by your child’s doctor or specialist nurse. To help keep your child hydrated, you will need to make sure that they have regular drinks throughout the day.

When should stimulant laxatives start to work?
Stimulant laxatives usually work within 6-12 hours. It is best to give the dose at bedtime, so your child is likely to feel the urge to go to the toilet the following morning, probably after breakfast.

Your child may want to try taking it at different times in the day to find the best time of day for them. Some people naturally have their bowel movements later in the day, rather than in the morning.
How long will my child need to take stimulant laxatives?

If your child has chronic constipation, they may need to take stimulant laxatives for several months. Whilst it is normally best to wean your child off these as soon as possible, it is better for them to take the laxative treatment than have long term constipation. Your child’s doctor or specialist nurse will see them regularly to review the dose that they are taking.

Do stimulant laxatives have any side effects?

All prescribed medicines have possible side effects, but most children do not experience any when taking stimulant laxatives. If they do, they may experience:

- stomach ache
- nausea and vomiting
- loose stools (diarrhoea)
- thirst and headache (possible signs of dehydration).

If you are concerned about your child while they are taking a stimulant laxative, seek medical help immediately from your child’s GP or NHS 111 out of hours (dial 111 freephone from landlines and mobiles).

Can I give other medicines at the same time as stimulant laxatives?

You can safely give your child medicines that contain paracetamol or ibuprofen, unless their doctor or specialist nurse has told you not to. Check with their doctor, specialist nurse or a pharmacist before giving any other medicines to your child.

What if I forget to give the stimulant laxatives?

If you remember within 4 hours, then you may give your child the missed dose. Otherwise, skip that dose and continue with the regular dosing schedule. Do not give a double dose to make up for a missed one.
How to contact us

If you have any questions you can contact the Paediatric Gastroenterology specialist nurses.

Tel: **01865 234 002**
(Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 6.00pm)

**Keep all medicines out of the reach of children.**
Never give any medication prescribed for your child to anyone else. It may harm them, even if the symptoms are the same.

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

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