

Rationale

Symptomatic treatment of infrequent constipation can usually be treated without the need for a GP consultation or prescription in the first instance. It can easily be treated with dietary changes and simple over the counter preparations like laxatives.

Recommendations for clinicians

- Provide the patient with a 'non-prescription' sheet or a patient information leaflet to promote education about self-limiting conditions suitable for self – care when appropriate.
- Advise patients of safe and effective self-care measures:
 - Drink plenty of fluids and increase physical activity taking regular exercise regularly, if possible .
 - Increase dietary fibre intake gradually e.g. fruit and vegetables, wholegrains, brown rice, wholemeal bread and wholegrain cereals
 - Keep a regular time for using the toilet , do not delay going when there is an urge to go . Resting feet on a low stool whilst on the toilet helps
- Advise patients to seek medical attention and consider treatment with a prescription in the following circumstances:
 - Persistent feeling of not being able to empty the bowels completely that doesn't go away within six weeks.
 - Accompanying symptoms e.g. abdominal swelling, vomiting, fever , pain
 - Patient aged over 50 and with constipation for the first time or patient on constipating medication e.g. clozapine, opioids
 - Blood present in stools and co-morbidities e.g. diverticular disease

Example of products available to buy over the counter*

Ispaghula Husk sachets e.g. Fybogel Hi-Fibre® – **not licensed for children under the age of 6** (~£2.99 for 10)
Macrogol sachets/liquid e.g. Movicol ® - **macrogol paediatric is licensed for children aged 2- 11yrs** (~£6.50 for 20 sachets or £7.00-£8.00 for 500ml liquid)
Lactulose 3.3g/5ml solution - **not licensed for children under the age of 11 months** (~£5.19 for 300mls)
Bisacodyl tablets e.g. Dulcolax® tablets/ 7.5mg/5mlsyrup - **not licensed for children under the age of 10 years** (~£2.35 for 20, ~£4.99 for 100mls))
Senna 7.5mg tablets/syrup - **tablets not licensed for children under the age of 6 years and syrup not licensed under 2 years** (~£1.85 -£5.39 for 20 tablets and (~£6.49 for 150mls
Glycerol suppositories - **not licensed for children under the age of 11 months** (~£3.29 for 12 x 4g adult, £2.60 for 12 x 2g children from 2 years and £2.69 12x1g children 11months – 2 years)
Docusate sodium 10mmg capsules - **not licensed for children under the age of 12 years** (~£3.69 - £5.00 for 30)

For further information see Self-care forum <http://www.selfcareforum.org/>, NHS UK <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/>, Patient UK <https://patient.info/>

*Prices correct at time of writing and are subject to change