

and establishing a bowel routine that allows for regular passage of stool. An increase in dietary fiber is recommended as a treatment for constipation in the healthy child. The amount of fiber for different aged children varies by various authorities but the formula of “age + 5 g” daily intake of fiber is recommended for children 3 years old and older ([Kranz, Brauchla, Slavin, et al, 2012](#)). Stool-softening agents such as docusate or lactulose may also be helpful. Polyethylene glycol (PEG) 3350 without electrolytes (MiraLAX) is a chemically inert polymer that has been introduced as a new laxative in recent years. Children tolerate it well because it can be mixed in a beverage of choice. If other symptoms (such as vomiting, abdominal distention, or pain) and evidence of growth failure are associated with the constipation, the condition should be investigated further.

Management of chronic constipation requires an organized and ongoing approach. The goals for management include restoring regular evacuation of stool, shrinking the distended rectum to its normal size, and promoting a regular toileting routine. This requires a combination of therapies, including bowel cleansing to remove the impaction, maintenance therapy to prevent stool retention, modification of diet, bowel habit training, and behavioral modification.

Nursing Care Management

Constipation tends to be self-perpetuating. A child who has difficulty or discomfort when attempting to evacuate the bowels has a tendency to retain the bowel contents, which initiate a vicious cycle. Nursing assessment begins with an accurate history of bowel habits; diet; events associated with the onset of constipation; drugs or other substances that the child may be taking; and the consistency, color, frequency, and other characteristics of the stool. If there is no evidence of a pathologic condition, the nurse's major task is to educate the parents regarding normal stool patterns and to participate in the education and treatment of the child.

Dietary modifications are essential in preventing constipation. Fiber is an important part of the diet. Parents benefit from guidance about foods high in fiber ([Table 22-7](#)) and ways to promote healthy food choices in children. Parents need reassurance concerning the prognosis for establishing normal bowel habits. It is important to