

# STOMACH PROBLEMS AND CYSTIC FIBROSIS



Stomach problems are very common in people with cystic fibrosis (CF). This fact sheet will help you know what to do when your child or youth with CF has symptoms that indicate a stomach problem.

## Symptoms:

- mild to moderate stomach pain
- more bowel movements or bowel movements that are a bit softer than usual

Note that bowel movements in people with CF should look like those of people without CF. (See the attached Bristol stool chart: type three or type four.)

**Often caused by: not taking enough enzymes** with meals and snacks.

## What you should do:

- Make sure your child or youth is taking the right dose of enzymes. If they need a lot of enzyme capsules with each meal, it sometimes helps to give some before and halfway through the meal.
- Make sure your child is remembering to take the right amount of enzymes, particularly at school.

If you need more advice, please contact the CF clinic, open Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 613-737-7600, ext. 2214.

## Symptoms:

- mild to moderate stomach pain
- fewer or slightly harder bowel movements than usual

**Often caused by: constipation.**

## What you should do:

- Make sure your child or youth is drinking enough water or other liquids, and is getting enough dietary fibre (fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains and legumes, such as hummus, chickpeas, lentils, etc.)
- Make sure your child is getting the correct dose of enzymes. Constipation is not caused by taking too many enzymes.
- If your child uses Lax-A-Day or Restoralax (PEG 3350), continue to use this daily. You can try giving an extra dose for a day or two.

If you need further advice, please contact the CHEO CF clinic or your community physician.

## Symptoms:

- sudden mild to moderate stomach pain
- sudden bowel movements that are very frequent, watery, very soft or diarrhea
- sudden vomiting and/or fever may be present

**Often caused by: infection or gastro** (gastroenteritis). Note that gastro is not related to CF and is common in children.

## What you should do:

- Follow the attached fact sheet for vomiting and diarrhea.
- If your child is getting worse, getting dehydrated and/or has blood in the diarrhea, please contact your community physician or go to the Emergency Department. Please do not contact the CF physician or clinic about this problem.

## Symptoms:

- moderate or severe stomach pain
- no bowel movements for a day or more
- vomiting may be present

**Often caused by:** a blockage of the intestines called **Distal Intestinal Obstruction Syndrome (DIOS)**.

**This is a CF emergency.**

## What you should do:

- Take your child to the Emergency Department right away. The physician there can contact the CF doctor on call for additional advice.
- Ask the CF team for advice on how to prevent DIOS from recurring. If your child has had this before and you've been given instructions on how to treat this at home with Peg Lyte or PEG 3350, please follow the instructions. If your child gets worse, you should take your child back to the Emergency Department.

## There are other causes as well:

- In people with CF, similar symptoms can be caused by **appendicitis**. A fever may also be present. Appendicitis is more common in CF patients. The doctors in the Emergency Department can determine whether your child has appendicitis.
- In people with CF, similar symptoms can be caused by folding of the intestines, which is called **intussusception**. Intussusception is more common in CF patients. People who have this may have some bowel movements that are bloody. The doctors in the Emergency Department can determine whether your child has intussusception by doing an ultrasound of the abdomen or using X-rays.

