**Laxatives – getting it right.**

Different laxatives works in different ways such as bulking up the stool, stimulating the bowel or, softening the stool. In practice, particularly in children it is probably more important to focus on finding a laxative that they will take, because if you give enough of any laxative it will usually work. Because the laxatives are likely to be needed for a long time, the most important consideration is trying to avoid a battle in giving or taking them. Laxatives are available as Tablets, Syrups or Powders -so we should be able to find something that is easy to give.

***The most important thing is to get the dose right. - The right dose is the one that works –***

This means pooing should be easy and comfortable with no struggling and you should be doing decent poos every time. Most children will need to poo every day; some may need to go more often and others less. Doing a poo should not be a relief. If after doing a poo they seem much happier – like a weight has been lifted off their shoulders, this means that it was the build-up of poo that was weighing them down and they should have gone sooner so will need more help – a higher dose.

It is not about what goes in, and not even what comes out. Rather than focussing on the poo we need to focus on the child. It is not about the child making perfect poos, but about the poos making a perfect child. If they produce what looks like a beautiful poo, but getting it out has been a struggle that is not great. If the only way they are comfortable is with very soft poo – that is fine.

As well as changing the dose of laxatives, you may want to change the time it is given. Although it is not always reliable, you can experiment with dosage and timing, so that ideally the poos will come at a convenient time –ideally before or after school hours.

***Starting off***

Usually when we start there is a bit of a backlog of poo that needs to be cleared. There is no easy way of doing this, so things may get messier and more painful before they get better. There is often a lot of old hard poo that needs shifting. Sometimes we give high doses to get a good clear out. The poo that comes out can contain hard bits and soft bits. The soft bits are usually just liquid poo coming round the edges. It is only diarrhoea if there is bucket loads of it. Once we have got things moving we need to keep them moving. This means getting good regular poos.

***Can the laxatives make things worse?***

The laxatives can make things worse if we give the wrong dose:

If we don’t give enough – the bowel will be stimulated which can be uncomfortable and this can lead to soiling/accidents. This is because there is a build-up of poo being held in. The laxatives can ‘push’ a bit which makes it harder to hold on so the poo slips out in bits and pieces but doesn’t all come out. The extra squeezing and holding on can cause more pain. . The poo needs more help to get out completely.

If we give too much there will be loads and loads of soft poo all of the time.

***Getting the right balance:***

Normally we would start on a dose of medicine – say for example 1 dose. You will have to monitor the poos for 5-7 days

If we are getting good comfortable, regular, decent poos that is brilliant and the dose is correct.

If it is too much we should cut the dose down.

If it is not enough then the dose will need to be increase. This can be either by a simple increase or after giving booster doses to clear the poo out and start again from empty. If an increased dose is required this means that the poo will have built up again, so expect it to get messy and uncomfortable as the old up poo comes out.

A common mistake is to give a child say 1 dose a day for a week and nothing happens and then to give 2 doses and loads comes out. It does not mean 2 doses is too much but after 8 days and 9 doses something has to give. The message here is that 1 sachet was making no difference and 2, 3 or even more doses may be needed.

***How do we know when to cut down or stop the laxatives?***

If the dose is clearly too high – too much poo all day every day, or if things have been well for a few months we can try reducing the laxatives. This is only a trial. If when the laxatives are cut down the withholding resurfaces then the dose will need to be increased. This can be back to the original dose, but sometimes an even higher dose is needed to get things back on track.

***Will they make the bowels lazy/ can you get dependent on them?***

This is a common concern. What we are trying to treat is the habit of stool withholding. Usually this has become a strong habit. The laxatives if given in the right dose help to retrain the body, but it is a slow process. If we stop them before the body has learnt to relax and let the poo out, then things will go backwards and it will look like the laxatives have made the bowels lazy or that you are dependent on them. If we see things through- and this can take months, or even years then we should be able to stop them.

It is similar to somebody giving up smoking, using nicotine patches or vapor cigarettes. Just because

they haven’t had a cigarette for a day or a week does not mean they have kicked the habit. So too, just because you have had a few poos does not mean that the withholding habit has been overcome.

Common Situations:

**My Child is doing lots of poos every day- often very soft and it just seems to come out .**

**They can be going 10-20 times a day**

In this situation there is still a big backlog of poo. The poo is trying to escape and the child trying to hold it in. Every so often a little bit escapes – for example as they pass wind. Each time there isn’t masses of poo, so if you were to collect all the poo passed in one day there would not be loads.

It maybe that the poo that is passed seems very soft – and may be very smelly. Every so often there may be a massive poo passed.

This can be difficult to understand but just because there are lots of poos it does not mean the laxative dose is too high. It is exactly the opposite. The laxatives are causing more messing without moving the big lumps – so the dose needs to be ***increased.***

**My Child can be clean but sometimes does massive poos and is often in a lot of pain -**

**‘feast or famine’**

The amount of poo produced is variable little or none on some days and loads on others. This again is a case where the poo is building up. As it builds up bits start falling out until there is a big clear out

In this situation a ***higher dose*** of laxatives is needed.

**My child is doing loads of soft poo**

The dose may be too high

Try reducing the laxatives- if this makes things worse – increase the dose again.

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