

THE FATAL FOUR

There are four major health issues identified in people with intellectual and developmental disabilities that have led to serious illnesses, infections, and sometimes death. They are called the Fatal Four: dehydration, seizures, choking/aspiration, and constipation.

CONSTIPATION

Causes of Constipation

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| Lack of fiber | Associated with medical conditions – diabetes |
| Inadequate fluids | Stroke, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome |
| Lack of exercise | Not enough time to use the toilet |
| Side effects of medications | |

Symptoms of Constipation

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| Small, hard stools | Refusing to participate in activities |
| Crying, grimacing, grunting, straining on toilet | Lack of appetite |
| Rectal digging | Avoids using the bathroom due to pain |
| Hitting abdomen | Staying in the bathroom for long periods |
| Hard, protruding abdomen | Fever |

Be Proactive to Prevent Constipation

- Provide/encourage fluids throughout the day especially for those unable to obtain fluids independently
- Increase dietary fiber: fruits and vegetables, whole-grain cereals and breads
- Encourage physical activity
- Offer opportunity for toileting on routine basis
- If unsure of type and number of stools, use a BM record
- Check BM record every shift; notify MD if no BM in 3 days or according to person's care plan
- Identify who is at risk and follow prevention strategies

CONSTIPATION IS LIFE THREATENING IF A LARGE IMPACTION BLOCKS THE INTESTINE. LARGE IMPACTIONS CAN ALSO TEAR THE INTESTINAL WALL, SEEP STOOL INTO THE ABDOMEN, ENTER THE BLOODSTREAM, AND CAUSE A SERIOUS INFECTION.