Constipation in Children

- Commonly occurs at 3 points in a child's development:

  - Introduction of solid foods or cow's milk
  - Toilet training
  - School entry

- Why?
  - Inadequate amount of fiber and fluid intake with introduction of solids/cow's milk.

    - Toddlers and young children need approximately 20 g/day of fiber

    - Fluid needs based on weight:
      - 10 lb child needs 32 ounces/day
      - 30 lb child needs 42 ounces/day
      - 45 lb child needs 50 ounces/day

    - Of this, 24 ounces of milk/day is sufficient to meet the daily recommended intake of calcium in children 1 - 5 years old.
    - Greater than 32 ounces of milk can slow the intestinal motility and make the child feel full so that they do not end up consuming enough fruits and vegetables.

  - Behavioral issues with toilet training and school entry

    - If not using a "child potty" the child may not have enough leverage to "push" if not touching floor while toilet training
    - Child may withhold stools if painful or hard
    - Child may not be ready or want to toilet train and purposely withhold stools
    - At school entry, child is starting to use the bathroom themselves and may be embarrassed.

- What can parents do?

  - Limit milk to 24 ounces/day in children 1-5 years who are constipated.
  - Supplement the rest of the fluid requirements with water.
    - Juice is high in sugar and has less fiber than real fruit even if the bottle says "from 100% real fruit."
  - Have child eat their food before giving them their liquid to get in the fruits and veggies.
  - Make sure while potty training the child can reach the floor with either a child size toilet of step stool beneath the toilet.
  - Ask child if they are going to the bathroom at school and promote a routine unhurried time on the toilet after meals.
  - Do not punish child or yell at child for not going to the bathroom or having stool incontinence.
  - Do reward the child for using the toilet with praise.

- Ask you doctor before using laxatives. These may be helpful short term, but develop unhealthy habits if used for a long period of time.