

Constipation

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This may be classified as absolute (i.e. neither faeces nor flatus is passed) or relative (where only flatus is passed). Absolute constipation is a cardinal feature of complete intestinal obstruction. Some patients may pass flatus or faeces after the onset of obstruction as a result of the evacuation of the distal bowel contents. The administration of enemas should be avoided in cases of suspected obstruction. This merely stimulates evacuation of bowel contents distal to the obstruction and confuses the clinical picture.

Figure 78.8 Visible peristalsis. Intestinal obstruction due to a strangu

lated right femoral hernia (arrow).

obstruction does not apply in: Richter's hernia; gallstone ileus; mesenteric vascular occlusion; functional obstruction associated with pelvic abscess; all cases of partial obstruction (in which diarrhoea may occur).

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