



NutritionMatters

Nutrition Services | Health Services Department

Helping Your Constipated Child

Childrens' habits

Bowel habits are different for every child. Some children have them after every feeding, some have them days apart. Both extremes are perfectly normal and are not necessarily a sign of constipation; it may just be your child's normal pattern. True constipation is rare in infants.

If your child has painful bowel movements that are hard, dry, pebble-like and difficult to pass, your infant or child may be constipated.

Why is my child constipated and what can I do to help?

Ages 0-6 months

At this age, some infants may be constipated if they don't get enough fluids. Sometimes certain medications or medical conditions may also be the cause.

What you can do:

- Offer the breast more often if you are breast feeding. Feed more frequently if you are bottle feeding formula.
- If your baby is bottle fed, offer sips of previously boiled water, but do not exceed 1-2 oz per day.
- If the stools are hard you may put some petroleum jelly around the bowel opening to ease the movement of the stool.
- Gently massaging your baby's abdomen may relieve some discomfort.
- Discuss concerns and treatment with your doctor.

Ages 6-12 months

Babies at this age may be constipated if they don't get enough fluid or fibre.

What you can do:

- Offer more breast milk or formula.
- Offer 1-2 oz of water between meals.
- Include undiluted, 100% pure prune juice. Try 1-2 oz at first. Pureed prunes may help too.
- Offer more fibre-rich foods (see list on back).
- Try gently moving your baby's legs in a bicycle motion. This may loosen stools.

Ages 1-3 years

Some children do not drink enough fluid or eat enough high-fibre foods. Other children may be constipated due to inactivity. Some children going through toilet training may "hold in" their bowel movement because they are scared of the toilet.

What you can do:

- Increase fluids: try water or prune juice. Offer 2 to 4 oz of juice two times a day.
- Offer 500-750 mL (16-24 oz) fluid milk daily. Fluids help to soften stool, but do not have fibre.
- Increase high-fibre foods (see list on back).
- Promote physical activity with your children! Go for a walk together!
- Provide your child with a firm foot support while on the potty. This position may make it more comfortable to pass a bowel movement.
- Be flexible and relaxed during toilet training – this may ease your child's fears.

Ages 3 years+

Some children may be constipated due to low intake of fluids and fibre or inadequate amounts of exercise. Some children at this stage “hold in” their bowel movements on purpose. Busy kids have better things to do than spend time in the bathroom! Some are afraid it will hurt or fear strange bathrooms (at child-care centres etc.). The longer they “hold it in”, the harder, drier and more difficult the stool becomes to pass.

What you can do:

- Set an example by following Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating and including whole grain choices, fruits and vegetables. If you enjoy these foods your child will too!
- Promote an active lifestyle - e.g. walk your child to school.
- Encourage fluids and fibre containing foods.



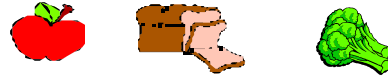
Call the doctor when:

- Your infant is under six months of age and experiences hard painful bowel movements.
- You have tried the suggestions listed here and your child is still constipated.
- Your child has not had a bowel movement for four days or more.
- You find blood in the stool.
- Your child is in a lot of pain during bowel movements.

Remember:

Do not give your child laxatives, enemas, suppositories or any medications without talking to your doctor first.

Facts on fibre:



Fibre is the part of food that our body cannot digest. Our body cannot break down fibre so it passes right through us and ends up in our stool. That is why fibre helps with constipation; it makes it easier to have a bowel movement.

Foods that are good sources of fibre are: fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals, and legumes such as beans and lentils. Fibre can only be found in foods that come from plants. Meat, chicken, eggs, fish, milk and milk products do not have any fibre. Fibre in foods is more effective as a laxative so favour the fruit over the juice.

When increasing fibre, be sure to add water too. Water helps fibre do its job! Increase fibre slowly to avoid causing gas, cramps and bloating.

Yummy fibre-containing foods:

Shreddies®
Corn Bran®;
Mini Wheats®
whole wheat bread and crackers
whole wheat mini bagels or pita
mini bran or carrot muffins
stewed prunes
apple slices
broccoli
orange segments
fruit cups
carrot sticks
hummus spread
bean salad (black and navy beans,
chick peas)
lentil soup