

## Constipation in babies and young children

Constipation in babies and young children is often a source of anxiety for parents and caregivers.

Constipation is bowel movements that are:

- Less often than usual
- Hard and dry
- Difficult or painful to pass

Your child is not constipated if stools are several days apart, but are soft and pain-free. Even if your child grunts, arches their back, stiffens their legs or turns red in the face when having a bowel movement, it is not a sign of constipation.

### Causes of constipation

- Not eating enough dietary fibre
- Drinking too much milk or juice
- Not getting enough fluids
- Not getting enough physical activity
- Food allergies
- Certain medical conditions and medications
- “Holding in” bowel movements

### Dietary fibre

Dietary fibre is a carbohydrate in plants that the body cannot digest. It adds bulk and makes bowel movements easier to pass.

Age of child	Grams of fibre recommended per day
0-12 months	Not determined
1-3 years	19
4-8	25

Research shows that if your child is getting enough fibre, offering more fibre may not help constipation, especially if they have started “holding in” their bowel movements.

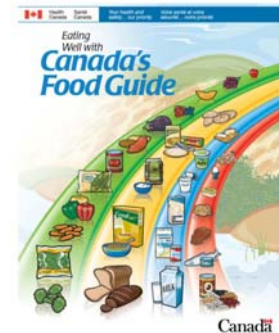
If your child eats these foods, they are likely meeting their fibre needs:

- Vegetables and fruit
- Whole grain breads, cereals and other grain products
- Nuts
- Legumes (beans, lentils)

Meat, chicken, eggs, fish, cheese, milk and milk products do not have fibre. Filling up on these foods and beverages can cause a child to be less hungry for foods that have fibre.

If you think your child is not getting enough fibre, try the following tips:

- Follow Canada’s Food Guide when planning meals and snacks
- Offer vegetables or fruit at every meal and snack
- Add high fibre cereals such as Bran Flakes™ to lower fibre cereals such as Corn Flakes™
- Choose products that are “100% whole grain”, not just “made with whole grains”
- Replace half of the white flour in recipes with whole-wheat flour
- Add beans or lentils to soup or spaghetti sauce
- If your child is over one year of age, limit milk intake to a range of 16-24 oz (500-750 mL) per day
- Limit juice to 6 oz (180 mL) per day



It is a myth that certain foods such as bananas and rice cereal cause constipation

Read the Nutrition Facts labels when you go shopping. Try to compare products and choose products that have at least 2 g of fibre per serving.

Nutrition Facts	
Per 3/4 cup (100 g)	
Amount	% Daily Value
<b>Calories 80</b>	
<b>Fat 1 g</b>	<b>1 %</b>
Saturated Fat 0 g	0 %
+ Trans Fat 0 g	
<b>Cholesterol 0 mg</b>	
<b>Sodium 2 mg</b>	<b>0 %</b>
<b>Carbohydrate 15 g</b>	<b>5 %</b>
<b>Fibre 3 g</b>	<b>12 %</b>
Sugars 7 g	
<b>Protein 3 g</b>	
Vitamin A 1 %	Vitamin C 2 %
Calcium 1 %	Iron 3 %

## Fluids

Not getting enough fluids can cause constipation. However, research shows that if your child is getting enough fluids, offering more will not help.

Your child is getting enough fluids if the colour of their urine is pale yellow to clear. If your child is in diapers, expect at least six wet diapers per day.

If your child is less than one year of age:

- Breastfeed or formula feed on demand
- If breastfeeding, make sure your child has a proper latch and is swallowing every 2-3 sucks. If you are experiencing breastfeeding difficulties, seek help at a breastfeeding clinic or with a breastfeeding expert
- If formula feeding, follow the exact instructions on how to prepare it
- Until your baby is 9 months of age, offer breastmilk or formula about 15-20 minutes before you feed solid food
- Once baby is eating solids, offer a sippy cup or open cup of water with meals

If your child is more than one year of age, keep water available between meals and snacks.

100% juices such as prune, apple or pear have high amounts of sorbitol and may help with constipation. Limit to 2 oz (60 mL) per serving and never offer juice in a bottle

## Physical activity

Physical activity helps to keep bowels working well. Being active together is fun and sets up a healthy lifestyle for you and your child. Try:

- Taking a walk to a park together
- Dancing
- Joining a local play group

## Food Allergies

Although constipation can be a sign of a food allergy, talk to your child's health care provider before removing any food from their diet.

## Medical conditions and medications

Talk to your child's health care provider if you think your child is constipated because of a medical condition or medication.

## “Holding in”

Some children “hold in” bowel movements, even before the toilet learning age. This makes bowel movements harder, drier and difficult to pass.

Why children may “hold in” bowel movements:

- Fear of using the toilet
- Fear of strange bathrooms
- Fear that the stool will hurt
- Having a crack or tear around the anus
- Feeling pressure to toilet learn
- Fear of letting go of a bowel movement
- Too busy learning and playing

If your child wriggles, fidgets, gets into a strange position (usually in a corner) or rises to their toes and stiffens the buttocks and legs, it may not mean they are constipated. It may mean they are trying to “hold in” their bowel movement.

Try these tips to help toilet learning:

- Schedule a regular toilet time to help your child get used to the bathroom. Start by having your child sit on the toilet about 30 minutes after meals
- Put story books in the bathroom
- Provide a toddler toilet seat with a stool or child's “potty” that allows a firm foot support
- If your child refuses to sit on the toilet, allow them to have the bowel movement in a diaper to prevent constipation from happening
- Be patient and flexible when toilet learning

## Medical attention

Seek medical attention if your child:

- Is less than six months and is constipated
- Has a fever
- Has blood in the stool
- Has pain during bowel movements
- Has slow weight gain or weight loss

Do not give your child laxatives, enemas, suppositories, other medications or herbal supplements without talking to your child's health care provider first.