

Dietary advice for constipation in children

Nutrition and Dietetics

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Information for Patients

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What is constipation?

Constipation is common in childhood, particularly when children are being potty trained at around 2 to 3 years old. You can recognise constipation when children do not poo often and or if it is difficult for them to do so.

How will I know if my child has constipation?

- If your child has not been for a poo at least 3 times in a week.
- If your child's poos (stools) are large, hard or painful to pass.
- If your child's poos could be described as pellets or rabbit droppings.
- Runny/ liquid poos as this may indicate that hard poos (stools) are backed up.

What can cause constipation?

- Not eating enough high-fibre foods
- Not drinking enough and/or dehydration.
- Too much pressure around potty training.
- Your child may be feeling anxious or stressed around going to the toilet.
- Lack of physical activity/ mobility (for example, wheelchair users)

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How to prevent constipation

What is fibre and why is it needed?

Fibre comes from the part of plant foods which are not digested in the small intestine. Fibre acts like a sponge within the large intestine to absorb water. This makes the poo softer and bulkier and easier to pass. Eating enough fibre makes it easier for your child to go for a poo more regularly and with less struggle.

How much fibre does your child need?

Age (years)	Grams (g) of fibre per day
2-5	15
5-11	20
11-16	25
16-18	30

Which foods are high in fibre?

Foods	Portion size	Grams of fibre
Porridge	30g	4g
Wholemeal bread	Thick slice	3g
Weetabix	1 biscuit	2g
Wholemeal pasta	100g	4g
Apple	Medium	2g
Strawberries	100g	4g
Baked beans	200g	7g
Broccoli	100g	3g
Peanuts	30g	3g
Jacket potato with skin on	150g	3g
Wholegrain rice	100g	2g

Plus all fruit and vegetables.

Fluid

If your child does not drink enough and is dehydrated then the body can draw water from the poo in the bowels to use in other parts of the body. This can make your child's poo hard and difficult to pass. The amount of fluid your child needs is based upon your child's age and weight.

Good sources of fluid include:

- Water – this is the best source of hydration
- Milk
- Fruit juice – although this contains sugar so limit your child to 1 small glass a day
- No added sugar diluted squash
- Foods with a high fluid content for example, fruit and vegetables or soups.

Fizzy drinks and juice contain a lot of sugar so should be limited.

Probiotics

Probiotics are live bacteria. They promote the good bacteria in your gut.

Probiotics may help your child:

- poo by increasing the 'good bacteria' within the bowel.
- go to the toilet regularly which may reduce the risk of constipation.

Speak to a doctor or dietitian for advice on what probiotics are available.

Activity

Regular activity such as walking, running and cycling can help activate the muscles in the bowel to help pass a poo.

For children with mobility restrictions speak to a physiotherapist for advice.

Massage

Some recent evidence suggests baby massages can reduce the symptoms of constipation and help your child to poo.

Contact details: 0116 258 5400 www.lnds.nhs.uk

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