



Foods to Treat Constipation

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Your child's doctor or a member of your child's health care team will talk with you about specific care for your child.

What is constipation?

Children are constipated when their stools are hard and bowel movements cause pain and/or bleeding when passed. There is no set number of stools that is normal for a child. If stools are not hard and do not cause pain or bleeding when passed, your child is not constipated.

What does my child need to eat to help prevent constipation?

Your child should eat foods that have lots of fiber to help prevent constipation. Fiber is not digested and makes stools larger, softer, and easier to pass. Most fiber is found in foods such as raw fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and legumes (dried beans and peas). Your child should also drink plenty of liquids. Liquids are very important to help prevent constipation. Fiber holds on to water in the intestine so that stools are easy to pass. When there is not enough liquid, extra fiber can be constipating because it clumps together and becomes hard.

How much fiber is enough?

For children 2 years of age and older, use this guideline:

- The child's age plus five equals the number of grams of fiber that should be eaten each day. For example, a 3 year-old needs: three + five grams per day = eight grams of fiber each day.

What are some foods that have fiber?

Many cereals, breads and grains have fiber, such as:

- Bran flakes, shredded wheat
- Oatmeal
- Bran muffins
- Graham crackers
- Brown rice
- Whole wheat bread

Have your child eat one or two fruits and one or two green vegetables a day:

- Dried fruits such as prunes, figs, dates, and raisins
- Peaches, pears, and apricots
- All types of beans and peas such as baked beans, kidney beans, black-eyed peas, pinto beans, and lima beans
- Cauliflower, broccoli, and cabbage

How much liquid should I give my child each day?

- Give your child four to eight cups (1 cup = 8 ounces) of liquids a day (as long as your child has not had fluids limited by his doctor).
- Offer your child one glass of a fruit juice such as apple, grape or prune. Sometimes fruit juice can help with constipation.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Foods to Treat Constipation, continued

- Limit milk to three glasses per day –milk may cause constipation.

What else do I need to know?

- Feed your child at scheduled times and allow only a certain amount of time for each meal and snack. A child that only picks at food during the day may be constipated because the intestine is not stimulated enough to work well.
- Exercise can help prevent constipation by increasing blood flow to the intestine.

Are there any foods or products that can be dangerous?

- **Do not** give corn syrup or honey to children less than 1 year of age, this can make them sick (causing Botulism).
- **Do not** give nuts and popcorn to children under 3 years old or to children who have swallowing problems. Nuts and popcorn can cause choking.
- **Gradually** add fiber to the diet. Adding a lot of fiber all at once may cause bloating, gas, or diarrhea (loose stools).
- Use laxatives or enemas **only** as directed by your child's doctor.

When should I call my child's doctor?

Call your child's doctor if the constipation gets worse or does not improve a week after a diet change.

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Foods to Treat Constipation, continued

Good Fiber Sources

FOODS	SERVING	MODERATE FIBER (2-4 Grams)	HIGH FIBER (5+ Grams)
Bread	1 slice	whole wheat, branola bread	_____
	1	wheat bran muffin	
	1 slice	Nutri-Grain waffle	
	2 cups	popcorn	
Cereal	1 oz	Bran flakes, Raisin Bran, Shredded Wheat, Frosted Mini Wheats, Oatmeal, Muslix, Granola, Oat Bran	All-Bran, Bran Buds, Corn Bran, Fiber One, 100% Bran
Vegetables	½ cup	beets, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, carrots, corn, green beans, green peas, acorn and butternut squash, spinach, potato with skin	artichoke
	1 medium	avocado	
Fruits	1 medium	apple with peel, date, papayas, mango, nectarine, orange, kiwi	pear
	½ cup	applesauce, raspberries, blackberries, strawberries	cooked prunes
	5-6		dried figs
	¼ cup	raisins	
Meat Substitutes	½ cup	_____	baked beans, black-eyed peas, garbanzo beans, lima beans, pinto beans, kidney beans, chili with beans, trail mix
	2 tbs.	peanut butter	
	1 oz.	nuts	

Tips for adding fiber to foods:

- Dip French toast into crushed cereal before cooking.
- Use granola, high fiber cereals, or fresh fruit as topping on ice cream or yogurt.
- Add high fiber cereals or fresh fruits to baked goods such as muffins, breads or pancakes.
- Leave the skin on homemade French fries.
- Use beans in soups, stews and chili.

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