

Tuckatalk

Constipation

What is constipation?

Constipation is when bowel motions (stools or poo) become difficult to pass. Bowel motions may be lumpy, dry or hard and may occur less often or cause straining at the toilet.

What causes constipation?

Your child may become constipated for many reasons. For example, your child may:

- Not eat enough fibre rich food each day
- Not drink enough fluid each day
- Drink too much cow's milk each day (more than 500ml if more than 1 year of age)
- Have low levels of physical activity
- Ignore urges to go to the toilet
- Hold onto bowel motions.

Bowel habits... what's normal?

- Different children can have different bowel habits
- Constipation is rare in fully breastfed babies and is uncommon in fully formula fed babies
- Breastfed babies may have more bowel motions each day than formula fed babies
- Babies stools may become more firm with the introduction of solid foods
- As children get older they tend to have less bowel motions each day and stools may become more firm.



How is constipation treated?

Constipation can usually be treated with a combination of diet changes, good toilet habits and medication if needed.

Babies (0-12 months of age)

- Offer fruit, vegetables, legumes (beans, lentils) and wholegrain breads and cereals each day
- Try fruits that have a mild laxative effect such as pear, kiwi fruit and prunes
- Offer extra drinks such as cooled boiled water from 6 months of age
- For formula fed babies check that the formula is prepared following the instructions on the tin
- Increase the amount of time your baby spends on their tummy while they are awake.

Children (over 12 months of age)

- Add extra fibre to your child's diet and include fruit, vegetables, legumes, wholegrain breads and cereals
- Limit highly refined breads and cereals such as Rice Bubbles®, Corn Flakes® and white bread
- Limit cow's milk to 500ml per day
- Offer your child more fluids to drink
- Try prune juice diluted with water or try mixing it with another fruit juice to improve the taste
- Increase the amount of physical activity your child does each day
- Decrease the amount of time your child uses screen based activities
- Start a regular toilet routine.



How to help your child develop good bowel habits:

- Provide a variety of high fibre foods each day
- Form healthy eating and drinking habits
- Start a regular toilet routine from an early age

How much fibre does my child need?

Age	Fibre (grams per day)
1-3 years	14g
4-8 years	18g
9-13 years, girls	20g
9-13 years, boys	24g

**Source: Nutrient Reference Values*

What are good sources of fibre?

To ensure your child eats enough fibre offer a variety of high fibre foods each day.

FOOD	FIBRE (g)
2 whole wheat cereal biscuits e.g. Weetbix™	3.3
100g apple, fresh with skin	2.4 - 3.2
2 slices wholemeal/grain bread	4.0
100g baked beans	4.8
100g frozen mixed vegetables, cooked	5.9
2 wholemeal biscuits e.g. Vita-Weats™	2.3
100g rolled oats, cooked	1.8
100g wholemeal pasta, cooked	5.7
20g peanut butter	1.2

**Source: Food Standards Australia New Zealand*

Where can I find out more information?

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT with a Canberra Health Services Community Dietitian by phoning (02) 5124 9977

Go to www.health.act.gov.au

*Source:

Nutrient Reference Values, nrv.gov.au

Food Standards Australia New Zealand, foodstandards.gov.au

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www.health.act.gov.au | Phone: 132281 | Publication No XXXXX

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What about bran?

Unprocessed bran is not recommended for children as it can decrease absorption of important nutrients such as calcium. It can also cause bloating and wind.

Medication

Your child may need laxatives. These can help soften your child's stool and help empty their bowel. Talk to your General Practitioner (GP) or pharmacist before giving your child medication

How can I help my child use the toilet?

- Encourage 'toilet time' after a meal. Ask your child to sit on the toilet for a few minutes.
- Make sure your child has a good toilet posture. Use a foot stool so their feet are flat or use a child sized potty.
- Praise your child for sitting on the toilet or potty.
- Don't punish your child if they have an accident.
- Use reward charts for extra encouragement.

