

Constipation in Babies and Children

What is normal?

- Babies grunt and get red in the face when having a bowel movement (poop, stool).
- Exclusively breastfed babies older than 6 weeks sometimes go many days between soft bowel movements. If you have concerns about your baby's feeding or bowel movements see your baby's doctor for a check-up.
- Bowel movements decrease down to about 1 or 2 each day from age 2 months to 3 years.
- Children 3 years and older have about 1 bowel movement each day.
- Bowel movements change in thickness, number and colour when a change is made to what your child eats (for example, when babies are starting cow's milk or solid foods).

Is my child constipated?

Your child may be constipated if bowel movements are:

- dry and hard
- difficult or painful to pass

When to get help...

Call your child's doctor or Health Link at 8-1-1 if you think your child is constipated **and** has any of the concerns below:

- blood in bowel movements
- fever
- vomiting
- bowel movement that is liquid or soft and leaking out of the anus
- signs of dehydration (decrease in number of wet diapers, dark urine, no tears, dry skin, dry lips, sunken eyes, sunken soft spot on head)
- tears in the skin around the anus

How can I manage constipation?

Read on for ideas you can try to help your child with constipation.

If your child's constipation doesn't get better after using the tips in this handout, see your child's doctor.

Physical activity

Daily physical activity may help with constipation. Babies and children should be active every day.

To learn more about keeping your child active, go to [Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines and Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines at http://www.csep.ca/english/view.asp?x=949](http://www.csep.ca/english/view.asp?x=949).



Babies under 6 months

- There is no need to give your baby fluids other than breastmilk.
- Check with your public health nurse or lactation consultant if you have concerns about breastfeeding.
- If your baby is using formula, carefully follow the mixing instructions on the formula label. Check with your public health nurse if you have concerns about your baby's feeding.
- If you are feeding your baby solid foods, it may be helpful to stop giving solid foods until closer to 6 months of age.

Follow up with your baby's doctor if constipation doesn't get better.



Babies 6–12 months

- Offer up to 1 oz (30 mL) of undiluted 100% apple, pear, or prune juice between feedings to a maximum of 4 oz (125 mL) in 24 hours. Juice should not replace regular feedings.
- If your baby has a bowel movement **within 24 hours**, you can **stop giving the juice**.



Follow up with your baby's doctor if there is no improvement within 24 hours.

Solid foods should be introduced around 6 months of age with continued breastfeeding. If not breastfeeding, babies should still be given formula until 3.25% (homogenized) milk can be offered at 9–12 months.

Each day offer your baby:

- sips of water from an open cup (about 2–3 oz or 60–90 mL at a time). **Water should not replace regular feedings.** Don't force your baby to drink.
- higher fibre choices such as:
 - baby cereal with iron (like barley, oats, brown rice, or wheat)
 - vegetables and fruit
 - beans, peas, and lentils

See the following pages for more ideas. Choose foods that match your baby's eating skills.



For 1 year and older

Offer fluids and higher fibre foods each day, based on your child's age and eating skills.

Fluid

Drinking enough fluid may help with constipation. Fluids include breastmilk, milk, water, and juice.

How much fluid should I offer my child per day?

Children 1–3 years: about **4 cups** (900 mL)

Children 4–8 years: about **5 cups** (1.2 L)

Girls 9–13 years: about **6 cups** (1.6 L)

Boys 9–13 years: about **7 cups** (1.8 L)

Girls 14–18 years: about **7 cups** (1.8 L)

Boys 14–18 years: about **10 cups** (2.6 L)

- Offer children **1–2 years old** breastmilk and/or 3.25% (homogenized) milk every day.
- Offer children **2 years and older** breastmilk and/or 2%, 1% or skim milk, or fortified soy beverage every day.
- Offer 2 cups (500 mL) of milk per day with meals and snacks.
- Offer water throughout the day and when your child is thirsty. Have a water bottle for your child to sip from during the day.
- If offering juice, undiluted, 100% apple, pear, and prune juice are the best choices for helping with constipation. **Limit juice to ½ cup (125 mL) per day.**



Fibre

Getting enough fibre may help manage and prevent constipation. Make sure to also offer enough fluid to keep bowel movements bulky and soft.

Increase fibre in the diet slowly. Use the tips and sample menu for ideas.

How much fibre does my child need per day?

Children 1–3 years: **19 g**

Children 4–8 years: **25 g**

Girls 9–13 years: **26 g** Boys 9–13 years: **31 g**

Girls 14–18 years: **26 g** Boys 14–18 years: **38 g**

Ways to add extra fibre

Vegetables and Fruit

- Leave the skins and peels on where possible and if your child can chew them well.
- Add chopped berries, carrots, apples, pears, rhubarb, and dried fruit when making muffins, breads or pancakes.
- Add vegetables to casseroles, soups, pasta sauces, pizza, and meatloaf.
- Add sliced fruit or berries to cereal.

Grain Products

- Sprinkle oat bran or crushed higher fibre dry cereals into fruit sauce, hot cereals, casseroles, meat loaf, burger patties, dips, yogurt, or sauces.
- Mix higher fibre cereals with lower fibre cereals.
- Use whole wheat flour, whole grains or bean puree when baking.

Milk and Alternatives

Most Milk and Alternatives don't naturally have fibre in them; however, you can have them with higher fibre foods like cereal or fruit.

Meat and Alternatives

Meat, poultry, and fish don't have fibre in them; however, many meat alternatives do.

- Serve baked beans with whole grain toast.
- Add beans, lentils, peas, or chickpeas to soups, tacos, chili, spaghetti sauce, and salads.
- Mix beans, salsa and cheese and wrap in a whole grain tortilla.
- Serve hummus or other bean dips with whole grain crackers, pitas or vegetables.
- Offer split pea or lentil soup.

Don't use fibre supplements, laxatives, or mineral oil unless your child's doctor and/or dietitian says you can. The best way to get fibre is from foods rather than supplements.

Choose higher fibre foods every day

The table below will help you choose higher fibre foods. Use the Nutrition Facts table on food packaging to choose foods with higher amounts of fibre.

Fibre source	Very high source At least 6 g fibre per serving	High source At least 4 g fibre per serving	Source At least 2 g fibre per serving
serving size = ½ cup (125 mL) unless other amount listed			
Vegetables		- artichoke, cooked - edamame (soybeans) - lima beans - peas, green - potato, baked with skin, 1 medium 	- spinach, okra, broccoli, Brussels' sprouts, carrots, green beans or corn, cooked - squash (acorn, butternut, spaghetti), parsnip, turnip - sweet potato, yam
Fruit	avocado, ½ fruit 	- blackberries - pear with skin, medium - raspberries 	- apple, kiwi, banana, orange, medium - apricot, fresh (3 fruits) - blueberries, strawberries - dates, figs or prunes, dried, ¼ cup (60 mL) - grapefruit, papaya, ½ medium - rhubarb, cooked
Grain Products	bran cereal (non-flake)	- bran cereal (flakes), ¾ cup (175 mL) - multigrain cereal, cooked, ¾ cup (175 mL) - oat bran, cooked, ¾ cup (175 mL) - oat bran muffin, homemade, 1 medium	- bread: whole grain whole wheat, rye, or pumpernickel bread, 1 slice - oatmeal, cooked, ¾ cup (175 mL) - pita, whole grain, ½ pita - wheat bran muffin, homemade, 1 medium - wheat germ, 2 Tbsp (30 mL) - whole grains: barley, bulgur, cracked wheat, buckwheat, pasta, quinoa, cooked
Read labels to find cereals with 4 g or more fibre per serving.			
Meat Alternatives	beans (kidney, black or navy), chickpeas or lentils, cooked, ¾ cup (175 mL) 	- almonds, sesame seeds, ¼ cup (60 mL) - flax seeds, ground, 2 Tbsp (30 mL) - hummus, ¼ cup (60 mL) - split pea soup, 1 cup (250 mL) - split peas, ¾ cup (175 mL)	- peanut butter, 2 Tbsp (30 mL) - seeds (pumpkin or sunflower) and nuts (hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pistachios, walnuts), ¼ cup (60 mL) 

Choking hazards: Some foods can cause choking in children under 4 years old. Foods like hard raw vegetables can be grated, cut into small pieces, or cooked to make them safe. Don't give foods like whole nuts, popcorn, and dried fruit to children under 4 years.

Sample menu to meet fibre needs

This menu meets Canada's Food Guide recommendations for children 1–8 years old. Portion sizes and amounts of fibre will vary based on a child's age, gender, and appetite.

Meal	Food and Drinks	Fibre (g)
Breakfast	- Oatmeal, quick oats, cooked, $\frac{1}{2}$–$\frac{3}{4}$ cup (125–175 mL) - Almonds in cereal, crushed, 1 Tbsp (15 mL) - Milk, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL) - Blueberries, $\frac{1}{4}$–$\frac{1}{2}$ cup (60–125 mL) 	2.5–4.5 1 0 1–2
Snack	- Apple, with skin, thinly sliced, 1 medium - Whole wheat English muffin, $\frac{1}{4}$–$\frac{1}{2}$ muffin - Milk, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL) 	2.5 1–2 0
Lunch	- Grilled cheese sandwich (made with whole grain bread), $\frac{1}{2}$ sandwich - Split pea soup, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL) - Cantaloupe, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL) - Water, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL) 	2.5 2 0.5 0
Snack	- Carrot sticks, 1 medium carrot - Hummus 1–2 Tbsp (15–30 mL) - Water, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL) 	1.5 1–1.5 0
Dinner	- Chicken, roasted, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz (75 g) - Brown rice, cooked, $\frac{1}{4}$–$\frac{1}{2}$ cup (60–125 mL) - Broccoli, cooked, $\frac{1}{4}$–$\frac{1}{2}$ cup (60–125 mL) - Milk, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL) 	0 1–1.5 1–2 0
Snack	- Corn bran style cereal, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL) - Milk, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL) - Water, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL)	2.5 0 0
	Water for thirst between meals/snacks $\frac{1}{2}$ – $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups (125–375 mL)	0
Total Fibre		20–26 g

Sources: Canadian Nutrient File, version 2010 accessed Feb 3, 2014.

Things to keep in mind

- All foods offered should be in a texture that your child can chew and swallow safely.
- Include a variety of higher fibre foods each day.
- If you are adding more fibre and fluids to your child's diet, don't force or bribe your child to eat or drink.
- As a parent, your role is to provide a variety of healthy foods at regular meal and snack times. Your child's role is to choose how much to eat.

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PDF (www.albertahealthservices.ca)

