

Constipation

Constipation is when a child has a hard poo or is not able to go to the toilet regularly; it is a common problem in children. It is normal for babies to poo anywhere up to 12 times per day to only once per week. A baby or child that is constipated usually experiences pain, straining or discomfort. Constipation can cause problems like stomach pain, loss of appetite, irritability or holding-on behaviours.

Treatment for constipation includes:

- a healthy diet with enough **fibre**
- adequate **fluid** intake
- regular **toileting**
- **physical activity**
- **medications**

Fibre

Fibre is the part of plant foods that is not fully digested by the body. Examples of foods containing fibre include fruit, vegetables, grains, breads, cereal products, legumes, nuts and seeds. Fibre is important because it adds bulk to poo, makes them softer and therefore easier to pass.

While it is important that your child eats enough fibre each day, giving too much fibre can make constipation worse. Aim for the recommended amount of fibre for your child. The fibre counter at the end of this resource can help you add up how much fibre your child is having. How much fibre does my child need?

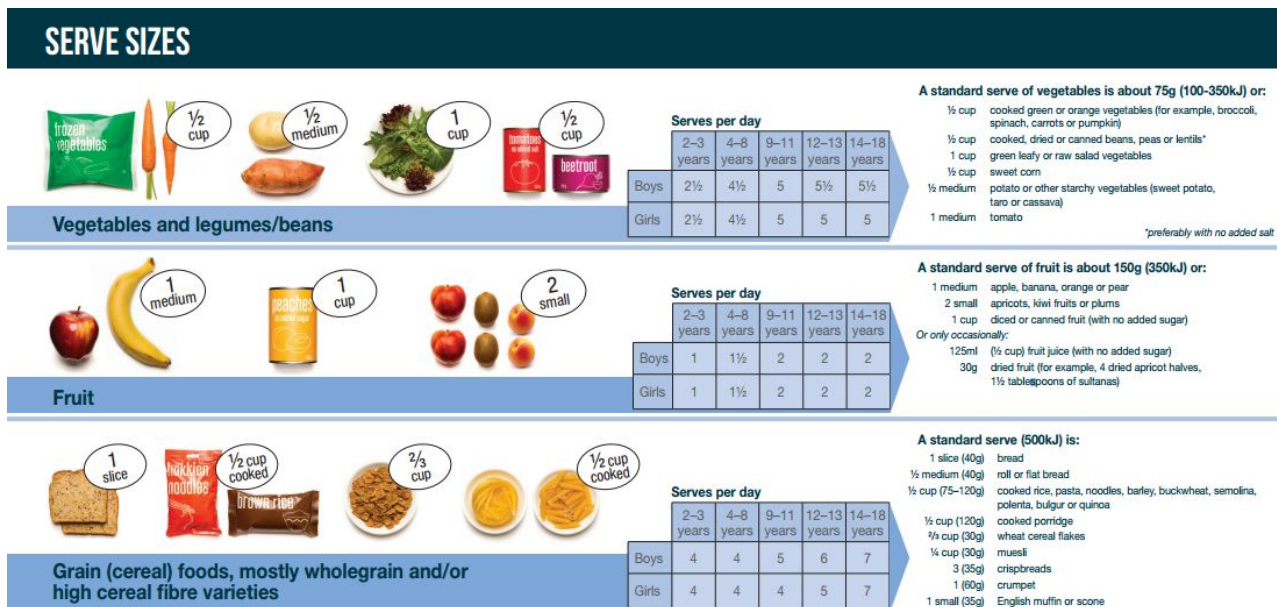
Age	Fibre per day
1-3 years	14g
4-8 years	18g
9-13 years (girls)	20g
9-13 years (boys)	24g
14-18 years (girls)	22g
14-18 years (boys)	28g

Reference: Nutrient Reference Values for Australia and New Zealand (2005)



Ways to increase fibre

One way to increase the fibre in your child's diet is to make sure they are eating enough grain foods, fruit and vegetables. The table below shows how many serves of each of these food groups your child should be having, and explains a serve size. Compare your child's diet to these recommendations, and increase the amount they are having if you need to.



Reference: Australian Dietary Guidelines 2013 - National Health and Medical Research Council

Some simple ways to add fibre to your child's diet include

- Choose wholemeal or multigrain bread and wraps, or white bread with added fibre
- Choose wholegrain breakfast cereals, eg Weetbix, Vitabrits, porridge, muesli.
- Choose wholemeal pasta and brown rice.
- Avoid plain biscuits, cakes, pikelets and buns. Instead offer wholegrain crackers and biscuits with dried fruit, rolled oats or seeds.
- Include a range of fresh fruit and vegetables. Leave skin on where possible.
- Add pulses, legumes and lentils to bolognaise, shepherd's pie, stews and soup.
- Replace white flour with wholemeal flour in recipes, for example use half wholemeal and half white flour when baking. Add dried and fresh fruit to baking.
- Limit snacks with poor nutritional value, as these are usually low in fibre, eg chips, biscuits, cakes, lollies. Offer fibre-containing snacks instead.

Infants

For babies under 12 months, there is no recommended daily fibre intake. If you think your baby is constipated, you should consult your family doctor or Child Health Nurse. If your baby drinks formula, make sure this is made up correctly. For infants over six months of age, increased fruit and vegetables in their diet might help. You can give your baby stewed

prunes or apricots - up to three tablespoons, three times each week. You can also try prune juice diluted 50:50 with water (eg 10mL of prune juice and 10mL of water). Start by giving 1mL and increase the amount until your baby is able to pass a soft poo.

Fluid

- Fluid helps make bowel motions softer. If you give your child more fibre make sure he or she is drinking plenty of fluid.
- Younger children need 4-6 cups of fluid each day. Older children need 6-8 cups each day.
- The best time for drinks is between or after meals. Drinks given before meals will fill up your child's stomach making them less hungry for food.
- Water is the best choice of drink for your child, as it will maintain their appetite for food. Cordial, soft drinks and fruit juice tend to reduce appetite. Milk is a very nutritious drink for children but limit consumption to no more than three small glasses (500-600 mls) per day.

Physical Activity

Regular physical activity helps maintain regular bowel motions. Make sure your child has plenty of time to play and be active each day. Even simple exercise like walking or bouncing on the trampoline will help.

Toileting

Children with constipation need to develop the habit of sitting on the toilet regularly. This helps the muscles relax and the poo to pass. Children should be encouraged to sit on the toilet for 3-5 minutes after each main meal, as this is when the bowel is most active. They should sit for 3-5 minutes, even if they do not feel the urge to go.

It is important to make sure your child's feet are supported (for example on a box or stool) and not dangling in the air. This allows your child to use their abdominal muscles to push.

Do not pressure your child to poo. Your child needs to feel relaxed and not in a rush. Using a sticker or reward chart can help some children.

If your child is holding on to bowel motions after a frightening or painful experience, you may need to use laxatives for several weeks to keep the poo soft. Discuss this with your doctor.

When to seek help

If you have tried the strategies discussed above and your child is still constipated, your child may need medication. See your GP, paediatrician or gastroenterologist.

If you would like more information, there are a number of useful websites and apps you can use to check the fibre content of different foods. Examples include CalorieKing and MyFitnessPal.

Fibre Counter

Food	Serve Size	Fibre (g)	Food	Serve Size	Fibre (g)
<i>Breads & grains</i>			<i>Fruit</i>		
Wholemeal bread	30g/1 slice	2.0	Apple	1 medium	3.0
White bread	28g/1 slice	1.0	Orange	1 medium	3.5
White high fibre bread	28g/1 slice	1.5	Mango	1 medium	5.0
Pita bread	60g	2.5	Prune	6 medium	4.5
Fruit bread	30g/1 slice	1.0	Banana	1 small	2.5
Cornflakes	1 cup	1.0	Grapes	100g	1.0
Bran flakes	1 cup	6.5	Sultanas	30g	1.5
Weetbix	30g/2 biscuits	3.5	Dried apricot	6 small	2.5
All Bran	40g	11.5	Canned fruit	1 cup	3.5
Fruity Bix	10 pieces	3.6	Strawberries	½ punnet	4.5
Muesli	60g/ ½ cup	6.0	<i>Vegetables</i>		
Sultana Bran	1 cup	2.9	Potato (no skin)	100g	1.0
Porridge	½ cup (raw)	4.0	Potato (with skin)	100g	1.7
Just Right	¼ cup	2.0	Broccoli	100g	4.0
Cornflakes	30g/1 cup	0	Capsicum	90g	1.5
Rice bubbles	30g/1 cup	0.5	Corn on cob	150g	5.0
White rice (cooked)	1 cup	1.5	Carrot (cooked)	½ cup	3.0
Brown rice (cooked)	1 cup	3.0	Green beans	100g	2.5
White pasta (cooked)	1 cup	3.0	Peas (frozen)	½ cup	4.5
Wholemeal pasta (cooked)	1 cup	8.5	Pumpkin	85g	1.5
Milk arrowroots	2 biscuits	0.5	Tomato	1 medium	2.0
Sao's	3 biscuits	0.5	Zucchini	1 medium	1.5
Wholemeal crackers	6 biscuits	2.0	Salad	1 cup	1-2
Rice cakes	2 cakes	0.5	Baked beans	220g	10.5
<i>Miscellaneous</i>			<i>Nuts (children over 3 years)</i>		
Popcorn	1 cup	1.0	Peanut butter	1 tbs	2.0
Corn chips	50g	5.0	Peanuts	30g	2.5
			Cashews	50g	3.0
			Almonds	30g	4.3

Source: Nutrition Education Materials Online, Fibre for Children, September 2013

Notes

References

Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, **Constipation**, November 2010.

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National Health and Medical Research Council & New Zealand Ministry of Health, **Nutrient Reference Values for Australia and New Zealand**, 2006.

National Health and Medical Research Council, **Eat for Health: Australian Dietary Guidelines Summary**, 2013.

Nutrition Education Materials Online, **Fibre for Children**, September 2013



Government of **Western Australia**
Child and Adolescent Health Service

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

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Contact a qualified healthcare professional for any medical advice needed.

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