

# Diet & Constipation for Children



You're in safe hands



## WHAT IS CONSTIPATION?

Bowel habits in infants and young children can vary greatly. Constipation is a change in bowel habits to harder, less frequent stools. A young child is constipated when going to the toilet causes pain or if they have difficulty passing a stool. Straining to pass a stool is not uncommon and quite normal.

### Why does constipation occur?

There are many reasons why children become constipated. More common reasons for constipation include:

- **Drinking too much milk**  
Children will sometimes drink rather than eat. If you fill a small child's tummy with 4 or more bottles of milk a day the child will feel full and there will be no room for food. Try to limit your child's milk intake to 600mls per day.
- **Missing meals**  
It is important to eat regularly and not to miss meals. If nothing is going in there will be nothing to come out. Try to get your child to eat regular meals and snacks. Children who don't eat are often the children that drink too much milk, tea, or cold drink or eat lots of luxuries between meals.  
Still ensure they are getting sufficient liquids, preferably in a cup.
- **Fussy eating**  
Often young children will go through stages of only eating a limited variety of foods. These foods are often low in fibre. It helps if the whole family changes their way of eating to include more high fibre foods and plenty of fruit and vegetables. Children often learn by example and love to copy older family members who they admire.
- **Environmental influences**  
Sometimes children's bowel habits can be affected by changes in their environment or by certain emotional factors. This also needs to be considered in the overall management of constipation.

### What is fibre?

Fibre is the part of plant food that is not broken down by the body. It is a very important part of your diet.

### What does fibre do?

Fibre makes food in your digestive tract more bulky by absorbing water into the gut. It helps you to go to the toilet regularly without straining and therefore helps to relieve constipation. It is better to increase fibre intake by taking in foods with a naturally high fibre content rather than using products that stimulate gut contraction (e.g. laxatives).

### Types of fibre

- **Soluble:** oat bran, pulses, most fruits and vegetables.
  - **Insoluble:** wholegrains, certain fruit and vegetables, nuts.
- Both soften and enlarge the stool making it easier to pass.

## HIGH FIBRE SHOPPING LIST

### **Bread**

Wholewheat-, rye- or health bread and crackers with raisins and seeds, bran muffins, flapjacks made with oats

### **Cereals & flour**

Bran flakes, High Fibre bran, oats, muesli, Wholewheat ProNutro

- Add raisins, fruit and nuts to porridge and cereal.
- Use wholewheat flour or exchange a part of the cake flour for wholewheat flour

### **Pasta & rice**

Wholegrain varieties:

Brown rice, wild rice, wholewheat pasta, pearled barley

### **Legumes**

Dried peas, lentils, dried beans, soya

### **Vegetables/ Salad**

To be eaten with skins as far as possible.

Good sources: Broccoli, carrots, spinach, peas, potato with skin, celery, green beans, onion, sweet potato with skin, mushrooms, cabbage, corn, and mixed salad ingredients.

### **Fruit**

To be eaten raw with pips, seeds and skins:

Apple, pear, apricot, banana, plums, guavas, dates, oranges, naartjies, paw-paw (all fresh fruits)

Dried Fruit: figs, prunes, apricots, pears etc.

### **Snack options**

Dried fruit, fresh fruit, popcorn, nuts and raisins, whole wheat crackers, high fibre cereal bars, high fibre breakfast cereals.

## HELPFUL HINTS

- Fluid is important. Your child should drink at least 6 cups of fluid every day.
- Do not replace food with fluids.
- Eat regular meals and snacks.
- Make sure snack choices are healthy choices.
- Eat more fibre rich foods. It is best for the whole family to change their way of eating to include more fibre.
- Read food labels and compare the fibre content of cereals and breads.
- Choose at least 4 portions of fruits and vegetables plus two other sources of fibre each day.
- Eat a wide variety of foods.
- Physical activity is important to keep your child regular.
- Have a set time for going to the toilet each day. After breakfast often works well.
- Make sure your child sits upright whilst on the toilet. To ensure proper posture try placing a small plastic step under their feet.
- Do not rush your child whilst on the toilet.
- Ask your dietitian or doctor to prescribe a suitable probiotic (a product that re-introduces “good” bacteria into your gut).





## SAMPLE MENU

### **Breakfast**

- Cooked oats with milk  
OR
- High fibre cereal with milk  
OR
- Wholewheat toast with jam
- Fresh fruit
- Milk / Tea / Water / Juice

### **Snack**

- Raw vegetables
- Yoghurt with muesli
- Juice or water

### **Lunch**

- Vegetable soup
- Wholewheat bread / roll with lean cold meat / tuna / chicken and salad
- Fruit

### **Snack**

- Wholewheat rusk / high fibre biscuit
- Dried fruit

### **Dinner**

- Vegetable and meat stew (broccoli, carrots, green beans, peas, sweet corn, mealies, lean meat) - add lentils or beans with brown rice  
OR
- Wholewheat pasta and vegetable bake  
OR
- Lean meat / fish / chicken served with jacket potato and vegetables or salad

### **Dessert**

- Stewed fruit, fresh fruit salad, baked apple

### **Bedtime**

- Homemade popcorn
- Wholewheat biscuit or oat biscuit
- A milky drink



# Diet & Constipation for Children

The information contained in this booklet is only a general guide and does not take the place of a nutrition consultant.

As each patient is unique it is very important to seek individual advice from a registered Dietitian to ensure that your diet is both balanced and nutritionally complete.

Please ask staff members to contact a Dietitian for you whilst you are in hospital or for contact details of Dietitians in your area.

DIETITIAN:

TEL NO:

