

CONSTIPATION

What is constipation?

Constipation means that bowel movements are difficult or painful to pass and less frequent than usual.

A child with constipation feels a desperate urge to have a bowel movement (BM) and has discomfort in the anal area, but is unable to pass a BM after straining and pushing for more than 10 minutes.

Going 3 or more days without a BM can be considered constipation, even though this may cause no pain in some children and even be normal for a few. Exception: After the second month or so of life, many breast-fed babies pass normal, large, soft BMs at infrequent intervals (up to 7 days is not abnormal) without pain.

Common Misconceptions About Constipation

Large or hard BMs unaccompanied by any of the conditions just described are usually normal variations in BMs. Some normal people have hard BMs daily without any pain. Children who eat a lot of food pass extremely large BMs. Babies less than 6 months of age commonly grunt, push, strain, draw up the legs, and become flushed in the face during passage of bowel movements. However, they don't cry. These behaviors are normal and should remind us that it is difficult to have a bowel movement while lying down.

What is the cause?

Constipation is often due to a diet that does not include enough fiber. Drinking or eating too many milk products can cause constipation. It's also caused by repeatedly waiting too long to go to the bathroom. The memory of painful passage of BMs can make young children hold back. If constipation begins during toilet training, usually the parent is applying too much psychological pressure.

How long will it last?

Changes in the diet usually relieve constipation. After your child is better, be sure to keep him on a non-constipating diet to that it doesn't happen again.

Sometimes the trauma to the anal canal during constipation causes an anal fissure (a small tear). If your child has an anal fissure, you may find small amounts of bright red blood on the toilet tissue or the stool surface.

How can I take care of my child?

• Diet treatments for infants less than 1 year old

For infants, several things you can try include 1) Taking a rectal temperature to stimulate a bowel movement. 2) Glycerin suppositories for infants which can be purchased over the counter. 3) Apple, prune, or pear juice of 1- 1 ½ ounces twice a day. 4) Switching to soy formula may also result in looser stools.

If your baby is over 4 months old, add strained foods with a high fiber content such as cereals, apricots, prunes, peaches, pears, plums, beans, peas, or spinach twice a day.

Strained bananas and apples are neither helpful nor constipating.

- **Diet treatment for older children over 1 year old**

- Make sure that your child eats fruits or vegetables at least 3 times a day (raw, unpeeled fruits and vegetables are best). Some examples are prunes, figs, dates, raisins, peaches, pears, apricots, beans, peas, cauliflower, broccoli, and cabbage. Warning: Avoid any foods your child can't chew easily.
- Increase bran. Bran is an excellent natural stool softener because it has a high fiber content. Make sure that your child's daily diet includes a source of bran, such as one of the "natural" cereals, unmilled bran, bran flakes, bran muffins, shredded wheat, graham crackers, oatmeal, high-fiber cookies, brown rice, or whole wheat bread. Popcorn is one of the best high-fiber foods for children over 4 years old.
- Decrease the amount of constipating foods in your child's diet. Examples of constipating foods are milk, ice cream, cheese, yogurt, and cooked carrots.
- Increase the amount of fruit juice your child drinks. (Orange juice will not help constipation as well as other juices).

- **Sitting on the toilet (children who are toilet trained)**

Encourage your child to establish a regular bowel pattern by sitting on the toilet for 10 minutes after meals, especially after breakfast. Some children and adults repeatedly get blocked up if they don't do this.

If your child is resisting toilet training by holding back, stop the toilet training for a while and put him back in diapers or pull-ups.

- **Stool softeners**

If a change in diet doesn't relieve the constipation, give a stool softener with dinner every night for one week. Stool softeners (unlike laxatives) are not habit forming. They work 8 to 12 hours after they are taken. Examples of stool softeners that you can buy at your drugstore without a prescription are Haley's M-O, Milk of Magnesia, Metamucil, and Citrucel. Give ½ to 1 tablespoon daily.

- **Relieving rectal pain**

If your child has rectal pain immediate relief, one of the following will usually provide quick relief:

- sitting in a warm bath to relax the muscle around the anus (anal sphincter)
- giving your child a glycerin suppository (through the anus)
- gently putting a thermometer in the anus for 10 seconds to stimulate the rectal muscle

If your child is still having problems with constipation after trying the treatment guidelines above, talk to your health care provider about using an enema.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY for advice about an enema if:

- Your child develops severe rectal or abdominal pain

Call during office hours if:

- Your child does not have a bowel movement after 3 days on the non constipating diet
- You are using suppositories or enemas

HIGH FIBER DIET

What is fiber?

Dietary fiber is that part of plant foods which humans cannot digest. Fiber is an important part of our diet, but the American diet usually contains much less fiber than is needed daily.

Why do we need fiber?

Increasing the amount of fiber in the diet can help to treat constipation, irritable bowel syndrome (spastic colon), diverticulitis (seen in adults only), chronic nonspecific diarrhea, and other disorders. It may help to lower cholesterol, prevent colon cancer or heart disease later in life, or help control diabetes.

How much fiber do we need?

Recommended fiber intake for adults is 25-30 grams per day. In children, it is age + 5 (up to adult levels), so that a 5 year old child's recommended fiber intake is 10 grams per day.

What kinds of foods contain fiber?

Fiber is found in:

- WHOLE GRAINS
- FRUITS
- VEGETABLES
- BEANS
- SEEDS
- NUTS
- Products that are enriched with added fiber

How do you know how much fiber you are eating?

You can count fiber grams, just like counting fat grams or calories. Food products are required to have labeling to show how many calories, fat, fiber, vitamins, etc. are in the food. If fiber is not listed on the label, it is less than 1 gram per serving.

How do I get my child to eat these foods?

Often children are eating sufficient fiber in their diet, but not eating it daily. By counting their fiber intake, you can more readily insure that they get the right amount of fiber each day. However, many children are very short of their daily recommended fiber intake and are "picky eaters". Here are some hints:

- Read labels.
- Keep a log of your child's fiber intake until you better know the fiber content of foods.
- Use food they like to get them to eat food they don't like as well (such as putting squirt cheese on Triscuits which have about 1 gram of fiber per 2 crackers).
- Crush very high fiber cereals such as All Bran or Bran Buds into a powder (by using a food processor or other device), and add them to foods. Wheat germ with whole bran can also be used. They easily mix in with oatmeal, spaghetti sauce, casseroles, or can be added to hamburger patties or meatloaf as the food is being prepared. Be sure not to add too much or you could have an "exploding meatloaf"!

FIBER CONTENT OF HIGHER FIBER FOODS**BREADS**

Bagel	1 bagel	0.6 gram
Bran muffin	1 muffin	2.5 grams
Cornbread	2-1/2 inch square	3.4 grams
Iron Kids	1 slice	1.5 grams
Oat bran pita	1/2 piece	1.8 grams
Raisin bread	1 slice	1 gram
Wonderkids	1 slice	2 grams

CEREAL

All-Bran	1/3 cup	9 grams
Bran Buds	1/3 cup	7.9 grams
Bran Chex	2/3 cup	4.6 grams
Fruitful Bran	2/3 cup	5 grams
Mueslix	1/2 cup	6 grams
Cracklin' Oat Bran	1/2 cup	4 grams
Crunchy Corn Bran	2/3 cup	5.4 grams
Raisin Bran (various)	3/4 cup	4 grams
Oatmeal	3/4 cup	1.6 grams
Cornflakes	2/3 cup	0.2 gram

LEGUMES

Baked beans	1/2 cup	3.3 grams
Black-eyed peas, cooked	1/2 cup	8.2 grams
Kidney beans, cooked	1/2 cup	7.3 grams
Lentils, cooked	1/2 cup	4 grams
Lima beans, cooked	1/2 cup	4.5 grams
Pinto beans, cooked	1/2 cup	5.2 grams
Pork and beans	1/2 cup	8 grams

NUTS & SEEDS

Almonds	10 nuts	1.1 grams
Peanuts	10 nuts	1.4 grams
Peanut butter	2 Tablespoons	2.5 grams
Popcorn	1 Bag	12 grams
Sunflower seeds	2 Tablespoons	1 gram

PASTA, SNACKS & CRACKERS

Corn chips	1 ounce	1 gram
Egg noodles, cooked	1/2 cup	1 gram
Goldfish (Pepperidge Farm)	1 ounce	1 gram
Graham crackers	4 squares	0.8 gram
Rice, brown, cooked	1/2 cup	1.5 grams
Rice, white, cooked	1/2 cup	0.8 gram
Spaghetti, cooked	1/2 ounce	1.1 grams
Tortilla chips	1 ounce	2.5 grams

FRUITS

Apple with skin	1 medium	3.5 grams
Apricots, dried	1/2 cup	8 grams
Banana	1 medium	3.2 grams
Cantaloupe	1/4 whole	1.5 grams
Cherries	10	1.2 grams
Orange	1 medium	2.5 grams
Peach with skin	1 medium	1.5 grams
Pear with skin	1 medium	4 grams
Raspberries	1/2 cup	4 grams
Strawberries	1/2 cup	1.5 grams

VEGGIES, COOKED

Asparagus	1/2 cup	1 gram
Broccoli	1/2 cup	2.2 grams
Brussel sprouts	1/2 cup	2.3 grams
Corn	1/2 cup	4.7 grams
Corn on the cob	1 medium	5.7 grams
Green Beans	1/2 cup	1.6 grams
Potato, with skin	1 medium	2.5 grams
Spinach	1/2 cup	4 grams
Sweet potato	1 medium	3.8 grams
Zucchini	1/2 cup	1.8 grams

VEGGIES, RAW

Celery	1 stalk	0.7 gram
Carrot	1 medium	2 grams
Cucumber	1 medium	1 gram
Lettuce	1 cup	0.9 gram
Tomato	1 medium	1.5 grams
Mushrooms, sliced	1/2 cup	0.9 gram

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MIRALAX USE

What medicine does my child need to take?

Your child needs to take Miralax.

Miralax is used for the treatment of constipation. It is not absorbed in the GI tract, and it is excreted in fecal contents. Therefore, it is safe to use on a regular basis and will not cause dependency. Below you will find instructions for both complete bowel cleanout and maintenance phases of treatment. We are unable to give you an exact time frame for the entire process, as each patient will have individual results. Miralax should be mixed in water, juice, or gatorade.

CLEAN OUT

- Stir the Miralax powder into water, juice or Gatorade. Your child's Miralax dose is **8 capfuls of Miralax powder in 32 ounces of liquid (for ages 4 and above)** (max dose 16 capfuls in 64 oz of liquid for more severe constipation and 4 capfuls in 16 ounces for ages 1yr-3yrs). Drink Miralax mixture over 2 hours and let the clean-out begin. There will be varying degrees of stool consistency throughout this process. Initially patient will have diarrhea, but this does not mean the clean out is complete. There is a possibility you will see food particles which is normal. Sometimes, an x-ray is needed to ensure a complete clean-out. If this is needed, we do request a follow-up exam for discussion of results and to order an x-ray if needed.

MAINTENANCE:

Does my child need to keep taking medicine?

At this point, you will decrease the Miralax to **one capful in 8 ounces of fluid** (max dose 2 capfuls in 8 oz fluid). After the clean out, your child will take a daily (maintenance) medicine typically for at least 6 months. Most experts begin with the full 8 ounce portion of fluid as mixed above but then vary dosing from 2 ounces 2x daily up to maximum of 8 ounces 2x daily with amount given based on consistency of stools the previous day. If several days of 8 ounces 2x daily is not producing results, it is time to do another “clean-out” over the next available weekend. The maintenance phase lasts the longest and is typically needed for a time period equal to the number of months or years the patient has experienced constipation. After a prolonged period of success, other dietary measures to include increase in fruits, vegetables, and other sources of fiber can decrease the need for ongoing use of Miralax.

OTHER USEFUL MEASURES IN ADDITION TO ABOVE PROCESS:

-Avoid dairy and dairy products.

-Increase dietary fiber to (age + 5) up to adult level of 25-30 grams per day and increase fruits and vegetables. GOAL FOR YOUR CHILD _____

-For younger children, potty sits after each meal and snack as needed. For older children, easy access to bathroom at home and at school (poop when you need to poop).

-Consider a daily Probiotic (Culturelle or Culturelle with Fiber) is a well-studied and good option.