

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

Constipation and your child's diet

Constipation is a common problem in children

If your child experienced pain on passing motions in the past they may well refuse to go to the toilet. This makes the situation worse, as the longer they hold on to their motions the more water is taken out by the bowels making them even harder and more painful to pass.

What is fibre?

Fibre or roughage is the general term given to the parts of plant foods we cannot digest.

The benefits of fibre

Fibre is essential for healthy bowel function. Research has shown that increasing the fibre content of the diet and taking plenty of fluids with regular toileting helps to prevent constipation. Fibre acts like a sponge, holding in water and producing soft easy to pass motions.

Types of fibre

There are two main types of fibre, **soluble** and **insoluble fibre**. It is important to include both types of fibre as part of a healthy diet.

Soluble fibre

- Oats
- Fruit and vegetables
- Beans and pulses

Insoluble fibre

Examples include:

- Wholemeal bread
- Wheat based cereals

Foods rich in fibre produce a feeling of fullness which may be helpful in children with a large appetite.



Patient Information

How to increase fibre

Eat more of these	Eat less of these
<p>Bread and cereals Wholemeal, wholegrain and seeded bread (avoid seeded breads in younger children) Wholemeal naan, chapattis, pittas. Wholemeal flour. Wholemeal pasta and wholegrain/brown rice.</p> <p>Whole wheat/wholegrain cereals such as Weetabix, Wheat flakes, Bran cereals, Shredded Wheat, Shreddies, Fruit & Fibre, Oatibix, Granola type cereals; puffed wheat, muesli and porridge.</p> <p>Fruit and vegetables All fruit: fresh, dried, frozen and tinned varieties.</p> <p>All vegetables especially peas, baked beans red beans; black eye beans and lentils.</p> <p>Note: leave skins on where possible.</p> <p>Cakes and biscuits Wholemeal or oat biscuits, wholemeal crispbreads. Cakes made with wholemeal flour.</p> <p>Snacks Nuts (not recommended under 5 years) seeds (avoid seeds in younger children), popcorn, fresh and dried fruit.</p>	<p>Bread and cereals White bread. White naan, chapattis, pittas White flour. White pasta and rice.</p> <p>Low in fibre cereals Such as corn flakes, rice cereals</p> <p>Cakes and biscuits Cakes and biscuits made with white flour such as: sweet plain biscuits, cream crackers.</p> <p>Snacks Sweets, chocolate and crisps.</p>

Some extra ideas and menu suggestions to increase fibre:

If your child is reluctant to eat the high fibre cereals, try mixing these with other lower fibre cereals if acceptance is a problem.

Try to give your child fruit and/or vegetables 5 times a day. The portion should be appropriate for the age of your child.

Fruit can be fresh, tinned or dried. Fruit is ideal as a dessert or as a between meal snack for example bananas and custard, banana splits, or banana sliced into yoghurt, tinned fruit in jelly, baked apples, fruit salad etc. Fruit can be liquidised with milk or yoghurt to make a 'smoothie'. Dried fruit such as raisins, sultanas and dates can be

Patient Information

used in baking, eaten in cakes and biscuits. It can be added to cereals or eaten alone. Children will often eat chocolate covered raisins even if they do not like dried fruit.

Vegetables can be fresh, frozen or tinned. Try to eat the skin where possible such as on jacket potatoes. Peas, beans (even baked beans) and sweetcorn are colourful, high in fibre and often liked by children. Try salad vegetables on sandwiches, as side salads or as between meal snacks for example cucumber, raw carrot and celery can be made into sticks. Extra vegetables can be added to casseroles such as celery, carrot and mushrooms added to a bolognese sauce. If your child is reluctant, chop them very small or grate them.

Try to buy **higher fibre biscuits** for the whole family. Suitable examples are digestives, Hobnobs, cereal bars, flapjacks, fig rolls, Garibaldi biscuits, fruit shortcakes, sultana cookies. Have whole wheat crackers as a snack. Kraka-Wheat, Jacob's choice grain, Hovis crackers and oat-cakes are all suitable.

Baked beans are high in fibre, try them on wholemeal toast. Try adding lentils or pearl barley or beans or chickpeas to casseroles. Baked beans are often well accepted when added to stews casseroles or soups.

Hummus is high in fibre and makes a good snack for children in pitta bread (try wholemeal pitta). Or dip vegetables into the hummus.

Drink plenty - fluids (water, squash, and fruit juices) are essential with a higher fibre diet to produce soft motions. Give at least **6-8 drinks daily**. Give after or during meals as drinking before may reduce the appetite

Note:

If your **child is less than 5 years old you** need to be careful that you do not increase their fibre intake too much. High fibre foods can be very filling and can reduce the total amount your child eats causing weight loss. If you are concerned that they are losing weight, weigh them or get them weighed at your clinic or GP. If weight loss occurs reduce the quantity of high fibre foods offered.

It is NOT true that bananas and eggs cause constipation.

Bananas are very high in fibre and are really useful in treating constipation.

Eggs and milk have no fibre in so they won't help solve the problem.

If your child is drinking large quantities of milk they are probably having this instead of food. Reducing their milk intake and encouraging more high fibre foods will certainly help.

High fibre information for children who need a soft diet

If your child only eats soft foods and cannot tolerate or manage normal food consistencies the following will give some useful ideas for increasing their fibre intake.

Whole wheat breakfast cereals such as Weetabix or Oatibix or Shreddies soaked in milk and porridge are all useful. They can be given as a snack as well as at breakfast.

Patient Information

Aim for five portions of fruit and vegetables each day

Fruit

- Tinned fruit and fresh fruit can be mashed or blended if necessary
- Smoothies are a useful way to include fruit
- Fruit such as apple can be stewed or cooked in the microwave
- Dried fruits such as apricots, prunes and plums can be soaked, cooked and mashed or blended if necessary

Remember that the fruit can go with custard, yoghurt or milk pudding.

Vegetables

- Root vegetables such as carrot, swede and parsnip can be mashed
- Baked beans can be mashed or blended.
- Tinned tomatoes blend well
- Lentils go very soft when well cooked with plenty of liquid
- Homemade vegetable or lentil soup
- Add vegetables to tinned or packet soup

Remember – vegetables can be included in a meat dish such as a casserole, stew or bolognese

Produced by Coventry Dietitians, University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire NHS Trust: Contact 024 7696 6161

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 6161 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

Document History

Author	Beverley Spicer
Department	Nutrition & Dietetics Dept
Contact Tel	26161
Published	May 2013
Reviewed	January 2016, July 2018
Review	July 2021
Version	3
Reference	HIC/LFT/1615/13