

Management of Childhood Constipation

This dietary advice sheet gives some general information to help you make the recommended changes to your child's diet. If you need more detailed advice, or if your child is following a special diet that makes it difficult for you to make these changes, please ask your doctor to refer your child to a registered dietitian.

By increasing your child's daily intake of **high fibre containing foods, fruit, vegetables and fluid**, you will increase the water content of the stools, make them softer and easier to pass. Too little of these may lead to constipation.



Fibre

- Fibre (also known as roughage) is found in plant foods such as wholegrain/wholemeal cereals, pasta, rice, bread, fruit and vegetables, nuts and seeds.
- Please see overleaf for a guide to the amount of fibre needed daily and ideas for foods containing fibre.
- **Slowly increase the fibre content of your child's diet by changing one food at a time.** His/her digestive system will need time to get used to it. Increasing too quickly can result in pain, bloating and wind.

Wheat bran

We do not recommend adding wheat bran to food as this can reduce the absorption of some vitamins and minerals, and it may be difficult for your child's digestive system to deal with.



Fruit and Vegetables

- Aim for at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day
- You can include fresh, frozen, canned, dried and pure juice (your child should only count one glass a day of pure juice towards the total of their fruit and vegetable portions).
- Use reward charts if your child needs extra encouragement to try their 5 a day.



1 handful = 1 portion

Fluids

- Aim for your child to drink at least 6-8 cups of fluid each day. Additional fluid may be needed during exercise and in hot weather.
- Suitable fluids are:
 - Water
 - Pure fruit juices (maximum of 2 glasses a day)*
 - Milk
- We do not recommend squashes as these can encourage children to develop a sweet tooth.
- At first it may be helpful for you and your child to keep a daily record of the number of drinks he/she has had.

*Apple juice in particular seems to help constipation due to the fermentation process of the apples.

Childhood Constipation

How much fibre should I give my child?

As a rough guide, you can calculate how much fibre your child should be aiming for every day by the following. In children over 2 years old:

$$\text{age} + 5 = \text{g fibre per day}$$

For example, a 4 year old would require $4 + 5 = 9\text{g}$ fibre day

However, all children are individual and while this may be ideal for most, your child may need more or less than this.

Fibre Content of Foods

FOOD	PORTION SIZE	FIBRE (g)
Bread		
Wholemeal	1 small slice	1.5
High fibre white	1 small slice	0.8
Brown	1 small slice	0.9
Wholemeal pitta	1 mini	1.8
Breakfast Cereal		
Weetabix/ Shredded Wheat	1 biscuit	1.9
Mini shredded wheat	Small bowl	3.4
Shreddies	Small bowl	3.5
Porridge	Small bowl	1.3
Biscuits/crackers		
Wholewheat cracker	2	1.0
High fibre crispbread	2	3.2
Digestive	1	0.3

FOOD	PORTION SIZE	FIBRE (g)
Fruit/vegetables		
Apple	1	2.0
Banana	1 medium	1.1
Orange	1 small	2.0
Grapes	10	0.6
Raisins	1 tbsp	0.6
Carrots	2 tbsp	2.0
Potatoes - baked with skin	small	2.7
Peas	2 tbsp	3.0
Broccoli	2 spears	1.5
Baked beans	2 tbsp	3.0
Pasta/rice		
Wholewheat pasta	3 tbsp	3.0
Brown boiled rice	3 tbsp	1.0

Sample Meal Plan

Breakfast Weetabix with a chopped banana and milk, glass of fruit juice.

Lunch Wholemeal roll with tuna and sweetcorn, yogurt or fromage frais and small bunch of grapes, glass of water.

Main Meal Spaghetti Bolognese with wholemeal pasta and salad, canned fruit salad in natural juice and custard, glass of water.

Snack ideas Dried fruit/digestive biscuit/slice malt loaf, water/dilute fruit juice/milk.

