



**Royal Surrey
County Hospital**
NHS Foundation Trust

High fibre diet for children with constipation

Nutrition and Dietetics Department

Patient information leaflet

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet is for parents and carers of children suffering with constipation. The leaflet will tell you what constipation is and what types of food will help with this problem.

What is constipation?

Constipation is when it is difficult to pass stools (also known as poo or faeces). Stools may be passed less often than normal, may be very small and hard and passing stools may be painful.

Why does my child have constipation?

Children can become constipated for a variety of reasons. Children often become constipated because they have not eaten enough foods containing fibre and or because they have not had enough to drink. Stools become harder, drier and more difficult to pass if there is little fibre and not enough fluid in the gut.

Children can also become constipated because they 'hold on to their stool'. This is when a child has the feeling of needing to pass a stool but resists this urge. The stool then becomes larger and more difficult to pass later. Children do this for reasons such as having experienced pain whilst passing a stool before, having a sore or crack on their bottom or dislike of unfamiliar or smelly toilets.

Some medical conditions can cause constipation but these are rare. Your child's doctor will have considered medical causes before referring your child to the dietitian.

How does food and drink affect constipation?

Stools are made up from the waste from our bodies including food which is not digested. Fibre is made up of two types: soluble and insoluble. Insoluble fibre is not digested by the body; it absorbs water in the large bowel making stools soft and easy to pass. If your child does not eat enough insoluble fibre, or if your child does not drink enough fluid their stool will be smaller, harder and drier. This type of stool is more difficult to pass.

How much fluid should my child drink?

Most children need to drink between six and eight cups of fluid in 24 hours. Some children find it difficult to drink. A drinking plan can help your child to remember to drink.

Drinking plan

Number of drinks in 24 hours: _____

Total fluid to be aimed for: _____

Breakfast: _____

Mid morning: _____

Lunch: _____

Mid afternoon: _____

Evening meal: _____

Bedtime: _____

How much fibre should my child have?

Age group	Amount of recommended fibre (grams per day)
Children (2-5 years)	15 grams
Children (5-11 years)	20 grams
Children (11-16 years)	25 grams
Adolescents (16-18 years)	30 grams

What foods contain fibre?

Fibre is found in cereals, fruit, vegetables, beans and pulses. The following tables show foods which contain good amounts of fibre which will help relieve your child's constipation.

	Portion	Grammes per portion
Bread		
Wholemeal bread	1 slice	2
Granary bread	1 slice	1.5
Brown bread	1 slice	2
High fibre white (Best of both)	1 slice	1.5
Wrap (wheat and white)	1 wrap	3
Granary, wholemeal	1 slice	3
Pasta, rice and cereals		
Wholemeal pasta	2 tbsp (cooked)	3
Brown rice	2 tbsp (cooked)	1
Pearl Barley	2 tbsp (cooked)	4
Pulses		
Lentils (red)	1 tbsp	1
Chickpeas	2 tbsp	3
Baked beans	3 tbsp	4
Hummus	1 tbsp	2
Quinoa	3 tbsp (cooked)	1
Red Kidney beans	1 heaped tbsp	2.5
Breakfast Cereal		
Bran flakes®	30g	4
Bite Size Shredded Wheat®	30g	3
Shredded Wheat®	30g	3
Shreddies®	30g	3
Fruit and Fibre®	30g	3
Weetabix®	1 biscuit	2
Mini Weetabix®	30g	3

Puffed Wheat®	15g	1
Cheerios®	30g	2
Weetos®	30g	2
Vegetables		
Peas	2tbs	3
Jacket potato with skin	½ potato	2
Sweetcorn	2 tbsp	2
Sprouts	3 sprouts	1
Parsnips	1 tbsp	1
Broccoli	2 spears	2
Fruit		
Pears	1 medium	3
Apricots (dried)	4 apricots	2
Figs (dried)	2 fruits	3
Prunes	3 fruits	2
Banana	1 small	2
Raisins/currants/sultanas	1 tbsp	2
Satsuma	1 small	1
Apple	1 small	2
Kiwi	1 fruit	2
Avocado	½ fruit	3
Orange	1 medium	3
Raspberries	10 pieces	1.2
Snack foods		
Plain popcorn	25g	2
Oatcakes	1 oatcake	1
Cereal bar	1 bar	1-2

Is a high fibre diet suitable for all the family?

High fibre diets are suitable for children and adults of all ages. Babies should not have high fibre diets in the first two years of life unless specifically recommended by a registered dietitian. Young children may get loose stools if given too much fibre. They also need sufficient energy to support their growth. High fibre diets can be low in energy so this needs to be considered.

Do you have any ideas for increasing fibre?

Always try to use high fibre breakfast cereals and wholemeal/granary or high fibre white bread.

Fruit and vegetables

Try to include 5 portions per day. All types of fruit and vegetables are good sources of fibre i.e. fresh, tinned or frozen. Leaving the skins on fruit and vegetables will increase the fibre content.

A portion is:

- One piece or one handful of fruit
- Three tablespoons of tinned fruit in natural juice or stewed fruit
- One tablespoon dried fruit
- Two to three tablespoons of vegetables

Try fresh or dried fruit as a snack or as a dessert after meals. Dried fruit can be used in baking or used to sweeten breakfast cereals instead of sugar. Try gently stewing prunes/figs/apricots and adding to yoghurt/ rice pudding or stewed apples.

Vegetables can be added to casseroles or soups and stews.

Pulses (beans, peas and lentils)

Use pulses in soups e.g. split peas or lentils, stews and casseroles e.g. baked beans, haricot beans. Try replacing half the meat in your recipes with peas, lentils, beans, dhal.

Rice, pasta and bread

Wholemeal pasta and brown rice are best as they contain more fibre than the white varieties. Try using half white and half wholemeal if your child is not used to the taste.

Are there any other tips to help with constipation?

- Exercise regularly e.g. walks to school, swim, ride a bike or scooter, play gym, skipping, play football
- Allow sufficient time for regular toileting
- Encourage children to use the toilet when they feel the urge to go
- Have access to clean and pleasant toilet facilities.

Suggested menu for preschool children

Breakfast

Cereal (from the list above) or wholemeal/high fibre toast, milk

Mid morning

Fresh or dried fruit, with a drink of water, milk or squash

Snack meal

- ½ Jacket potato with tuna mayonnaise, carrot sticks
- Yoghurt
- Drink of squash or water

Mid afternoon

Drink of milk, water or squash and breadsticks

Main meal

- Sausages with mashed potato and peas or whole wheat pasta with tomato sauce and grated cheese
- Custard or jelly with tinned fruit
- Drink of water

Bedtime

Milk if wanted

Total fibre content = 9g (approx)

Suggested menu for school children

Breakfast

High fibre cereal or toast (wholemeal or high fibre white), milk

Break

Drink of water and fruit

Packed lunch

Ham sandwich or wrap (wholemeal or high fibre white), cherry tomatoes, yoghurt/fromage frais, piece of fruit, water

After school

Milk and cereal bar

Main meal

- Spaghetti bolognaise with whole wheat pasta
- Strawberries and ice cream

Total fibre content = 13g (approx)

References and further reading

- Food Standards Agency (2002) McCance and Widdowsons' The Composition of Foods, 6th Edition. Cambridge: Royal Society of Chemistry.
- Slavin JL. Position of the American Dietetic Association: Health implications of dietary fibre. J Am Diet Assoc.2008;108(10):1716-31.
- Williams CL.et al. A new recommendation for dietary fiber in childhood. Pediatrics,1995,96: 985-8
- National Institute of Clinical Excellence guideline (NICE) 2010: nice.org.uk/guidance/CS99/chapter/1-guidance#/diet-and-lifestyle
- British Dietetic Association Food Facts: <https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/fibrefoodfactsheet.pdf>

Department Disclaimer

This leaflet is produced by the dietetic department at The Royal Surrey County Hospital, NHS Foundation Trust. It is not a substitute for dietary advice given to a specific individual by a dietitian. If you need to see a dietitian, ask your GP or consultant for a referral.

Please note that the information in this leaflet was correct at time of writing. The ingredients of manufactured products can change.

Contact details

If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet please contact the dietetic department at the address below:

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PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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