

# Happy & Healthy Pediatrics

Pediatric, Adolescent, & Breastfeeding Medicine



## Dietary Changes to Improve Constipation

Constipation in children has very little to do with the frequency of stooling, it has to do with the stool's consistency. Hard, pebble-like stools are considered constipation in a child. Even if a child is passing these "doody balls" 20 times/day, that is still considered constipation. What we strive for in pediatrics are stools that are the consistency of chocolate pudding. Hard, constipated stools often hurt the child to pass and you may see small amounts of blood when you wipe the child. Here are some ways to treat/prevent constipation in a child:

- Increase fluids. Try to motivate children to drink extra fluids without adding additional sugar to their diet (for example, by encouraging juices, sports drinks, ice tea, lemonade, soda, etc.). Adding a piece of fruit to their water may be motivating such as lemon, mango, strawberries, or orange. Blending ice and offering the child a "slushy" they can eat with a spoon may also be helpful.
- Limit milk (in children over 1 year of age) to no more than 16 ounces/day. To limit dairy overall to 2-3 servings/day. Cheese can also be very constipating. Too much dairy is the leading cause of constipation in a child.
- Avoid fried foods.
- Encourage fruits and vegetables, greens, nuts, seeds, dried fruits, beans, lentils, bran, oats, and whole grains.
- Sprinkle flax seed or chia seeds onto oatmeal or breakfast cereal, or add to a shake.
- Add 1 tablespoon of coconut or olive oil to the child's food.
- Soak raisins overnight and add them to oatmeal or cereal.
- Start a daily probiotic-Please see "probiotic Handout" for more info.
- In infants less than 5 months of age who are not eating solid foods yet, prune or pear juice can be used to treat hard stools. 1 ounce 2-3 times/day can be used as needed. Babies in that age group do not usually poop every day, especially if they are breastfed. As long as the stools are soft, an infant can poop even once per week and it is normal. No treatment is necessary. We would only treat with juice if the stools are hard. (This is the only time a pediatrician ever recommends juice-otherwise, there is no nutritional need for juice in the diet). Older babies can eat the foods listed above.
- Make a shake including several of these foods if children are not open to eating these foods on their own.
- Benefiber (a powder, fiber supplement) can also be added to the child's food or fluids. It is a clear, flavorless powder than can be added to water or to most foods including tomato sauce

and pancake batter. There is not one marketed for children, but it is safe for children to use the product.

12 years to adult 2 teaspoons three times daily

6 to 11 years 1 teaspoon three times daily

1-6 years 1 teaspoon two times daily

- Fiber One also has created several products that are high in fiber-their cereal bars and brownies are low in sugar.
- If your child is still constipated, please call our office for assistance.

### Examples of High-Fiber Foods

| Food                              | Grams of Fiber |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Fruits</b>                     |                |
| Apple with skin (medium)          | 3.5            |
| Pear with skin                    | 4.6            |
| Peach with skin                   | 2.1            |
| Raspberries (1 cup)               | 5.1            |
| <b>Vegetables, Cooked</b>         |                |
| Broccoli (1 stalk)                | 5.0            |
| Carrots (1 cup)                   | 4.6            |
| Cauliflower (1 cup)               | 2.1            |
| <b>Beans, Cooked</b>              |                |
| Kidney beans (½ cup)              | 7.4            |
| Lima beans (½ cup)                | 2.6            |
| Navy beans (½ cup)                | 3.1            |
| <b>Whole Grains, Cooked</b>       |                |
| Whole-wheat cereal (1 cup flakes) | 3.0            |
| Whole-wheat bread (1 slice)       | 1.7            |