



GOOD Bite

for childcare staff

Constipation

Constipation is the passing of hard and dry poos. Pain and discomfort may be felt when passing the motion. Constipation can affect as many as one in four children

The texture of poos is more important than how often they are passed. Even if a child passes a motion every few days, if they are soft, bulky and easy to pass, the child isn't constipated. If the motion is hard and dry with reduced water content then it is constipation. See the Bristol Stool form chart. Type 3 and 4 is ideal. Type 2 and 1 are examples of harder poos reflecting constipation.

At the beginning of the 'poo journey'- poo is sloppy. As it passes along the large intestine water is being reabsorbed, so that by the time the poo reaches the last part of the large intestine and the rectum the water content is much lower. Anything which slows down this transit time means more water will be reabsorbed by the body and the poo becomes harder. If the child doesn't go to the toilet to pass the motion, more water can be reabsorbed compounding the problem.

Simple strategies such as increasing fluid consumption and eating foods with plenty of dietary fibre will help. Dietary fibre reduces the transit time, meaning the poo will pass through the gut in a shorter space of time and arrive at the rectum with a higher moisture content and be easier to pass. Exercise will also help to quicken the transit time. Hence fibre, fluid and exercise are the usual preventative strategies.

The amount of fibre a child needs can be seen in the table over the page.

Other reasons for constipation in children include whether a toddler is 'too busy' and doesn't 'go' on time. Also a history of constipation and the pain involved can lead to fear and anxiety about opening the bowels. However the longer the stool remains in the rectum, the larger and harder it becomes, making it even harder to pass.



BRISTOL STOOL CHART

	Type 1	Separate hard lumps	Very constipated
	Type 2	Lumpy and sausage like	Slightly constipated
	Type 3	A sausage shape with cracks in the surface	Normal
	Type 4	Like a smooth, soft sausage or snake	Normal
	Type 5	Soft blobs with clear-cut edges	Lacking fibre
	Type 6	Mushy consistency with ragged edges	Inflammation
	Type 7	Liquid consistency with no solid pieces	Inflammation

By Cabot Health, Bristol Stool Chart - <http://cdn.intechopen.com/pdfs-wm/46082.pdf>, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=44394561>

Once constipation has been established treatment, with laxatives is often required. It is important to diagnose and treat constipation early so that it doesn't become a chronic problem. Stool softeners, lubricants or even suppositories may be needed to soften hard poos. Seek advice from a doctor, pharmacist or child health nurse.



Constipation in infancy

It is rare for breastfed infants to become constipated. Breastmilk contains substances that soften stools and increase stool volume. Constipation is more likely in babies fed formula and can occur when the feeds are made up incorrectly e.g. by adding more than the recommended amount of milk powder.

Constipation in growing children

There are several factors which may contribute to constipation in older babies and toddlers. As babies start solids there should gradually be less milk in the diet. Cool boiled water needs to be offered between feeds. Constipation may occur if babies don't drink enough. Mild dehydration resulting from a fever or if the baby is in a warm environment can lead to constipation.

As babies are weaned onto rice cereal, fruit and vegetables etc., they will be increasing their dietary fibre intake.

High Fibre ideas for toddlers

Where is fibre found? Fibre is only found in foods from the vegetable kingdom. I.e. breads and cereals (45%), fruits (10%) and vegetables (30%), nuts, seeds and legumes (15%).

Wholemeal or wholegrain breads, cereals and crackers are the best. High fibre white bread, wholemeal cereals like

Adequate Fibre Intakes by Age

1-12 months:	No Level Set
1-3 Years:	14 grams/day
4-8 Years:	18 grams/day

porridge, Weet Bix, Vita Brits, Mini Weets etc. are great. Wholemeal pasta and rice is also fine. All fruit and vegies are good. Fresh, frozen, canned or dried will have fibre. Foods such as sweet corn, peas, baked beans, sweet potato and potato are all popular with toddlers.

Fruit juice generally contains very little if any fibre.

The following table shows 2 days' worth of food that will easily meet a child's fibre requirement.

High fibre toddler meals

	Day 1	Day 2
Breakfast	Weet Bix, Vita Brits or Mini Weets Few Sultanas on top, Milk	Baked beans on toast Glass of milk
Morning Tea	Glass of fat reduced milk Wholemeal crispbreads e.g. Vita Weet, Ryvita with vegemite, cheese	Glass of fat reduced milk Vegetable sticks and hommous
Lunch	Egg and lettuce sandwich on High fibre white Bread Bunch of grapes	Jaffle made with Turkish bread. Cheese and ham filling
Afternoon tea	Toasted Fruit Loaf with margarine Mandarin segments Glass of Milo	Fruit platter
Evening Meal	Spaghetti Bolognaise with kidney beans/ red lentils Wholemeal pasta Salad Water	Chicken Mashed potato Corn Peas Water
Supper	Warm milk with Shredded wheatmeal biscuits	Fruit and custard

Contact Us!

This fact sheet is produced by the Central Coast Public Health/Community Nutrition Team. If you have any suggestions or nutrition topics you would like covered please contact us by telephone on 4320 3691 or fax on 4320 2828.



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