

Constipation in Babies and Young Children

What is normal?

- Babies may grunt, strain or cry when they poop.
- Breastfed babies older than 6 weeks sometimes go many days between poops.
- Pooping less often is usually fine if the stool is soft and easy to pass.
- Stools can change in texture and happen more or less often when a baby's diet changes, like when they start eating solid foods.

What is constipation?

- Constipation means a child poops twice a week or less, and the stool is hard, dry, painful, or very large.

What causes constipation in children?

The most common reason kids hold in their poop is because they're afraid pooping will hurt. Other causes include:



- Dehydration (not drinking enough)
- Not eating enough foods with fibre
- Not enough physical activity
- Stress from changes in routine (like starting childcare or toilet training too early)
- Some medications or supplements
- Some medical conditions or food allergies

Tips to Boost Fibre

- ✓ Have vegetables or fruit at every meal and snack.
- ✓ Add berries, carrots, or apples to pancakes, muffins, loafs.
- ✓ Add black beans and lentils to soups, stews.
- ✓ Choose whole grains like brown rice, pot barley, rolled oats.
- ✓ Add chia, ground flax, or hemp seeds to cereal or yogurt.
- ✓ Use Fruit Spread on toast or in yogurt or cereal.
- ✓ Ensure all foods are a safe texture.
- X Don't give fibre supplements unless a doctor tells you to.

Fruit Spread

1/3 cup raisins
6 pitted prunes
1/2 orange, peeled
2 tbsp prune juice
2 tbsp orange juice

Place in blender for 2 minutes.

Store in the fridge for 2 weeks.

Offer 1 – 2 tbsp a day, if needed.

0 to 6 Months

- Make sure your baby drinks enough. Offer human milk or iron-fortified formula based on their hunger and fullness cues.
- Babies under 6 months don't need water or other drinks unless advised by a doctor or dietitian.
- If you're using formula, carefully follow the mixing directions on the label (iron in formula does not cause constipation).
- Wait until about 6 months to start solids.
- Help your baby get at least 30 minutes of tummy time every day.

When to Get Help

Call a Doctor or HealthLink BC 8-1-1 if your child:

- Has bloody or black stool.
- Has tears in the skin around their anus.
- Is toilet trained but starts having poop accidents in their underwear.
- Still has constipation after trying tips in this handout.

Check with a doctor before giving your child any medicine like suppositories, stool softeners, laxatives, or enemas.

6 to 12 Months

- Offer human milk or iron-fortified infant formula according to baby's cues.
- If offering formula, carefully follow mixing directions on the label.
- Offer sips of water in an open cup.
- Wait until 9-12 months to offer cow milk.
- Include foods with fibre every day: see ideas on the other page.
- Occasional use of prune, apple, or pear juice may help soften stools to make pooping easier. Offer 1oz (30mL) between feedings, but no more than 4oz (125mL) over 24 hours. Juice should not replace regular feedings, meals, or snacks. Offer a sip of water after juice.
- Help your baby stay active with tummy time, rolling, reaching, crawling, and playing with toys. Limit time spent in car seat, stroller, or highchair.



12 - 24 Months

- Limit cow's milk to 2 cups (500mL) each day so your child stays hungry for food.
- Offer water with and between meals.
- Offer high-fibre foods each day.
- If your child is ready for toilet training, try to make a regular routine, and avoid too much pressure. Support children's feet when on the toilet – this helps them poop more easily.
- Occasional use of prune, apple, or pear juice may help. Offer up to 4oz (125mL) as a part of a meal or snack.
- Encourage physical activity such as walking, running, dancing, climbing stairs and playing outside. Aim for at least 180 minutes throughout the day.

More Information

- Call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 and ask to speak with a Dietitian
- Speak with your Doctor, Nurse, or Dietitian.
- [Constipation, Age 11 and Younger | HealthLink BC](#)
- [Healthy bowel habits for children | Caring for kids](#)