

# Managing Constipation in Babies and Toddlers up to 2 Years of Age

## What is constipation?

Your child is constipated when:

- They pass hard or dry stools (poop).
- They strain or feel pain when passing stool.

If constipation lasts more than 2 weeks, see your family doctor.



## When can a child get constipated?

Your child is more likely to get constipated when:

- There is a change in their diet.  
(Example – when solid foods are started)
- They drink less fluid than usual.
- They have had a recent illness with a fever or throwing up.
- There is a change in routine, such as toilet training or starting daycare
- They will not go to the toilet when away from home.

They are not given enough time on the toilet for a bowel movement (to go poop).

## Prevent and manage constipation in babies

For babies **younger than 6 months**:

- ✓ Breast feed whenever they seem hungry until 2 years of age or beyond.
- ✓ If your baby is formula-fed, check that you are adding the correct amount of water when making the formula.
- ✓ Wait until your baby is 6 months old before you start giving juices or solid foods.

Do not give your baby corn syrup, brown sugar, or other sugars mixed with water. Do not offer water or juice to treat constipation.

- ✓ If you think your baby is constipated, talk to your family doctor or public health nurse.



## Managing Constipation in Babies and Toddlers up to 2 Years of Age - *continued*

### Prevent and manage constipation in toddlers

For toddlers **6 months or older**:

- ✓ Continue to breast feed.
- ✓ Offer water in an open cup between meals and at snack time.
- ✓ Offer no more than ½ cup (125 mL) of 100% pure juice in a day.
- ✓ Limit cow's milk and other milks to no more than 3 cups (750 mL) in a day.
- ✓ Offer a wide variety of healthy foods that are the right texture for their age. Individual foods do not usually cause constipation.
- ✓ Once your toddler is about 1 year old, offer 3 meals and 2 snacks at regular times each day.
- ✓ Offer foods that are good sources of fibre.
- ✓ **Gradually** add more high fibre foods. Doing it gradually will help prevent gas and stomach pain.
- ✓ Offer vegetables or fruits rather than juice – for example, slices of apple instead of apple juice.



1 cup = 250 mL



Suggestions for high fibre foods:

- Vegetables and fruit – offer at every meal and snack
- Whole grain infant cereals like oatmeal, barley, or brown rice cereal
- Cooked and mashed lentils or beans
- Soft, mashed fruit can be added to infant cereals
- Pieces of ripe fruit
- Cooked yams, squash
- Cooked brown rice, whole grain pasta
- 100% whole grain bread  
(Look for 4 grams of fibre, or more, per slice of bread – look on the Nutrition Fact Table on the bread package.)
- Whole grain wheat, pea, or bean flour in cooking and baking

### Other tips

- ✓ Wait until your toddler is 2 years old before adding uncooked bran to their food.
- ✓ Before giving your child a fibre supplement, ask your doctor. Fibre supplements can be harmful to a child's gut.
- ✓ Establish a regular toilet time and toilet routine. A good time to go to the toilet is after meals. Give your child lots of time when sitting on the toilet. Do not rush them.

### When to get help

If your child's constipation does not get better **within 2 weeks**, take your child to your doctor.

### It's good to ask

If you have questions about **your child's nutrition**, call 8-1-1 to speak to a registered dietitian at HealthLinkBC.

If you have questions about **your child's health**, contact your local Public Health Unit to speak to a registered nurse.