

## How can constipation in children be prevented?

Eating foods with plenty of fibre and drinking plenty makes stools (faeces) that are bulky but soft and easy to pass out. Getting plenty of exercise is also thought to help.

### Food and fibre

This advice applies to babies who are weaned and to children. Foods which are high in fibre are fruit, vegetables, cereals and wholemeal bread. A change to a high-fibre diet is often 'easier said than done', as many children are fussy eaters. However, any change is better than none. Listed below are some ideas to try to increase your child's fibre intake:

- A meal of jacket potatoes with baked beans, or vegetable soup with bread.
- Dried (or semi-dried) apricots or raisins for snacks.
- Porridge or other high-fibre cereals (such as Weetabix®, Shredded Wheat® or All Bran®) for breakfast.
- Offering fruit with every meal - perhaps cut up into little chunks to make it look more appealing.
- Perhaps do not allow sweets or desserts until your child has eaten a piece of fruit.
- Another tip for when children are reluctant to eat high-fibre foods is to add powdered bran to yoghurt. The yoghurt will feel grainy, but powdered bran is tasteless.

### Drink

Encourage children to drink plenty. However, some children get into the habit of only drinking squash, fizzy drinks or milk to quench their thirst. These may fill them up and make them less likely to eat proper meals with food that contains plenty of fibre. Try to limit these kinds of drinks. Give water as the main drink. However, fruit juices that contain fructose or sorbitol have a laxative action (such as prune, pear, or apple juice). These may be useful from time to time if the stools become harder than usual and you suspect constipation may be developing.

### Some other tips which may help

- Try to get children into a regular toilet habit. After breakfast, before school or nursery, is often best. Try to allow plenty of time so they don't feel rushed.
- Some kind of reward system is sometimes useful in younger children prone to holding on to stools. You could give a small treat, or use stickers or star charts to reinforce the message.
- Praise your child for passing a stool in the potty or toilet but do not punish accidents. It is easy to become frustrated with soiled pants or a child who refuses to pass a stool.
- Try to keep calm and not make a fuss over the toilet issue. If your child can see that you are stressed or upset, they will pick up on this feeling; the toileting issue can then become even more of a fraught battle. The aim is to be 'matter of fact' and relaxed about it.