

## HELP --- MY CHILD IS CONSTIPATED

### *My child is an infant between 6 months and 12 months old*

Once an infant starts eating solid foods, her bowel movements will change. The stools become firmer with more consistency. One of the first foods often given to infants is an iron-fortified cereal (oat, barley, rice). Giving a baby cereal is important to make sure he receives enough iron as his body is rapidly growing. However, when cereal is introduced, some babies will become constipated which means the bowel movements are hard and difficult to pass. If this happens, here are some ways to help.

1. You may stop the cereal for a few days until the bowel movements are softer. Rice cereal seems to be more constipating than oatmeal or barley cereal – so you may want to try a different type of infant cereal. When you restart the cereal, you can also add either flax seed oil or fruit to the cereal as listed below.
2. Other foods may also be constipating. Applesauce and bananas may cause some babies to have hard stools. Decrease or stop these foods until your baby’s bowel movements are soft.
3. Offer your infant a little extra water by bottle or cup every day. The more solid food your baby is taking, the more water he will need. By the time he is 12 months old, he should be taking 4 – 6 ounces of water a day.
4. The “P” fruits will help your baby “poop”. Try peaches, plums, pears, or prunes. Sometimes sweet potatoes and yams will also help.
5. You can add 1 – 2 tablespoons of prune juice to your infant’s cereal or other food.
6. Flax seed oil is another natural way of helping your baby have soft bowel movements. You can add 1 - 2 teaspoons to the cereal or to a bottle of milk.

### *My child is a toddler between 12 months and 36 months old*

Toddlers often become constipated because they will not eat enough food with fiber. It is important to help your toddler have soft bowel movements, since toddlers who have a painful bowel movement may later resist toilet learning. However, we do not want you to get into “food battles” with your toddler as you will never win! You cannot force your toddler to eat a specific food, but you can help her bowel movements stay soft. Here are some ideas.

1. You can offer a variety of fruits and vegetables each day. Your toddler may surprise you by choosing a food today that he refused yesterday.
2. Allow your toddler to “dip” her veggies into something fun, like melted cheese, yogurt, hummus, ketchup or mustard.

3. Consider eliminating or decreasing the amount of milk she drinks. Cow's milk can cause constipation in some children.
4. Some toddlers will enjoy uncooked, crunchy vegetables such as broccoli or carrots that are cut up into small pieces.
5. Newer food items that your toddler may enjoy include "veggie bootie" and "spinach nuggets".
6. Try putting your favorite spices on the vegetables. Cooking vegetables in garlic and olive oil is appetizing and healthy.
7. You can also add flax seed oil (1 – 3 teaspoons each day) to your toddler's yogurt or cereal.

*My child is 3 years of age or older*

Constipation in the older child can happen for several reasons. The most common reason is still usually due to his diet.

1. Consider eliminating cow's milk for one to two weeks to see if that helps.
2. See if your child will drink 2 ounces of prune, pear, or plum juice each day.
3. If your child will not take these juices, you can add flax seed oil to his food, such as cereal or yogurt.
4. There are many stool softeners that are available over the counter.
  - a. Milk of Magnesia can be given – 1 to 2 tablespoons a day
  - b. Metamucil and Citrucel are also available 1 – 2 tablespoons a day
  - c. Benefiber
5. Miralax powder is available over the counter and can be used for children who have persistent constipation that does not respond to any of the above measures. Please talk with your pediatrician before using Miralax.

Constipation can also be associated with urinary tract infections. If your child describes painful urination or is having daytime accidents, please consult your pediatrician.

Rarely, constipation can be caused by a more serious illness. If your child remains constipated even though you have tried the changes mentioned above, please call your doctor.

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