

## When Your Child Is Constipated

This handout explains ways to help your child have a normal bowel movement pattern. Constipation is caused by a buildup of dry, hard stools or very large size stools. When food moves too slowly through the body, bowel movements are less frequent and hard to pass.

Constipation can be caused by:

- Not being physically active.
- Not drinking enough fluids.
- A diet low in fiber or "roughage."
- Irregular bowel habits.
- Medication side effect

### Fiber

Fiber is what stays in our body after the plant food we eat passes through the digestive tract. There are two types of fiber:

- **Soluble fiber** – This type of fiber attracts water and turns into a gel during digestion. This can help make stool softer and easier to pass. Good sources of soluble fiber include whole grain oats, oat bran, pectin in fruits (like the inside of an apple), dried beans and peas, barley, and vegetables.
- **Insoluble fiber or 'roughage'** – This type of fiber helps keep you regular. It absorbs water to soften and add bulk to the stools. This leads to faster movement through the gut and helps relieve constipation. Good sources of insoluble fiber include whole grain breads and cereals, wheat and rice bran, dried peas and beans, vegetables (like the skin of a baked potato) and nuts\*.

Fiber and water work together to help prevent and relieve constipation. Liquids add fluid to the colon and bulk to stools. This makes bowel movements softer and easier to pass. Help your child drink more fluids as you increase the fiber in their diet.

### Tips

- Plan meals at set times. Allow plenty of time for the meal.
- Set aside a time of day to use the toilet when your child will not be rushed or feel embarrassed.
- Give your child plenty of fluids. Your healthcare provider can give you a fluid goal for your child. For example, for a child that weighs between 41-90 lbs, a typical goal is 6-8 cups (48-64 oz) fluids per day. Water, milk, fruit juices, yogurt, pudding, ice cream, gelatin, and popsicles are all fluids.
- Warm liquids can help get the bowel moving. Warm lemon water in the morning or at night may help.
- Provide choices of foods high in fiber such as raw fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals, popcorn\*, and bran.
- Use prunes or pears and their juices for their laxative effect.
- Help your child be active and move their body to get the bowel moving too!

### How to Increase Fiber Intake

The amount of fiber your child should have each day is at least the child's age plus 5 grams. For example, a 6 year-old should take in 6 grams plus 5 grams for a total of 11 grams of fiber per day.

Slowly increase your child's dietary fiber to avoid bloating or gas. Increase higher fiber foods slowly over 3-4 weeks. Also increase your child's fluid intake as you increase your child's fiber intake.

Write down your child's intake for a couple days. Then add up the amount of fiber to see how much your child is eating. Read labels to find out the grams of fiber in foods or use an online tool like "Calorie King."

### How to Increase Fruit Intake

- Cut fruit into slices or coins and serve with nut butters, yogurt, or pudding dips.
  - Blend a smoothie with fresh or frozen fruit, yogurt and/or milk.
  - Spread with peanut butter.
- Use fruit cup snacks in ready-to-use containers.
- Add dried or fresh fruit to muffin mixes, pancake batter, cereal, salads, gelatins, quick breads, and cookies.
  - Make fruit kabobs on popsicle sticks.
  - Make trail mix with dried fruit.
  - Leave peels on when you can.

### How to Increase Vegetable Intake

- Grate vegetables and add to pancakes, quick breads, cookies and muffins.
- Add corn, peppers and tomatoes to tacos.
- Serve vegetable sticks with dip or hummus.
- Add chopped vegetables to salads, soups, casseroles, and sandwiches.
- Spread with peanut butter or cream cheese.
- Add to omelets or stir-fries.
- Bake sweet potatoes like French fries and sprinkle with cinnamon.
- Add cooked vegetables to pasta sauces.

- Use a spiralizer to create zucchini noodles ("zoodles").
- Add a handful of baby spinach to a smoothie with fruit, yogurt and/or milk.

High Fiber Fruits and Approximate Fiber Content		
Food	Serving	Grams
Pear with skin	1 medium	4.3
Strawberries	1 cup	3.9
Figs, dried	2	3.5
Orange	1 medium	3.1
Kiwi	1	2.6
Apple	1 medium	2.0-2.5
Avocado	½	2.0
Blackberries	1/3 cup	2.0
Cantaloupe	1 ½ cups	2.0
Fruit preserves	5 Tbsp	2.0
Raisins, seedless	¼ cup	1.9
Banana	1 medium	1.8
Prunes, dried	3	1.8
Grapefruit	½	1.6
Peach with skin	1 medium	1.4
Pineapple	½ cup	1.2
Grapes, seedless	½ cup	1.0
Watermelon	1 cup	0.6

High Fiber Vegetables and Approximate Fiber Content		
Food	Serving	Grams
Potato baked w/skin	1 medium	3.6
Carrots	½ cup	3.4
Sweet potato w/skin	1 medium	3.4
Broccoli	½ cup	2.5
Spinach	½ cup	2.5
Carrot	1 medium	2.3
Green beans	½ cup	2.1
Spinach, as greens	1 cup	1.9
Popcorn	2 cups	1.8
Zucchini (raw)	½ cup	1.8
Cabbage, shredded	1 cup	1.7
Asparagus	½ cup	1.6
Tomato	1 medium	1.6
Mushrooms, sliced	½ cup	1.5
Cauliflower	½ cup	1.3
Lettuce, Romaine	1 cup	1.0
Celery	1 stalk	0.6
Cucumber, sliced	½ cup	0.5

### How to Increase Legume Intake

- Add beans to rice or have a "Mexican night" using refried, pinto, or black beans.
- Try three bean salad or black bean or lentil soup.
- Try frozen burritos made with beans.
- Make or buy bean dip or hummus for snacks with tortilla chips, crackers and raw vegetables.
- Sprinkle chopped peanuts on yogurt or sundaes.
- Offer baked beans.

High Fiber Legumes (Cooked) and Approximate Fiber Content		
Food	Serving	Grams
Black beans	½ cup	7.5
Kidney beans	½ cup	7.3
Baked beans, canned	½ cup	7.0
Refried beans	½ cup	6.0
Black-eyed peas, canned	½ cup	4.0
Lentils	½ cup	3.7
Green peas	½ cup	3.6
Soybeans	½ cup	3.0
Peanuts*, dry roasted	¼ cup	2.9
Peanut butter, crunchy	2 Tbsp	2.0

### How to Increase Grain Intake

- Spread whole wheat bread or rolls with fruit preserves with seeds.
- Add seeds or crushed high fiber cereals to bread or pancake mixes.
- Use some whole grain flour for part of white flour in baking.
- Use 1 slice whole wheat and 1 slice white bread for a sandwich.
- Use whole wheat bread for French toast and whole wheat pancake or waffle mix.
- Mix brown and white rice. Try wild rice in soup or as a side dish.
- Add wheat germ, chia seeds or ground flax seed to baked products. Sprinkle on ice cream, yogurt, pudding, sauces, soups, or salads. Add to smoothies, shakes or oatmeal. Add a small amount of ground flax seed to mayo or mustard when making a sandwich.

Breads, Grains, Crackers, Chips, Seeds and Nuts and Approximate Fiber Content		
Food	Serving	Grams
Bagel, wheat	1 whole	4.0
Bagel, blueberry	1 whole	2.0
Bagel, multigrain	1 whole	2.0
Bagel, cinnamon raisin	1 whole	2.0
Barley, cooked	½ cup	3.0
Bran muffin	1	1.2
Bread, whole wheat	1 slice	2.0
Bread, pumpernickel	1 slice	2.0
Bulgur, uncooked	1 Tbsp	2.0
Cereal bar Fiber One®	1 bar	5.0-9.0
Chia seeds, whole	1 Tbsp	4.0
Corn taco shells	2-3	2.0
Crackers Triscuits®	4	2.0
Crackers Wheat Thins®	16	2.0
English muffin, whole wheat	1	3.0
Flaxseed, ground	1 Tbsp	2.0
Rice, brown (cooked)	½ cup	2.0
Rice, wild (cooked)	½ cup	2.0
Sun Chips®	10	2.0
Flour tortilla	1	1.0
Whole wheat tortilla	1	2.0
Tortilla chips	16	2.0
Waffles, wheat	2	3.0
Wheat germ	2 Tbsp	2.0

(Read labels closely as fiber content varies greatly from product to product)

**\*Do not give peanuts, nuts, and popcorn to children under 2 years of age. Young children may choke on these foods.**

### How to Increase Cereal Fiber Intake

- Use Grape Nuts®, bran or crushed cereals to top yogurt, ice cream or canned fruit.
- Mix high and low fiber cereals.
- Make Rice Krispie treats with part high fiber cereal; include wheat germ, peanut butter or nuts.
- Make homemade trail mix using high fiber cereals, nuts and dried fruit.
- Add bran cereals, bran or wheat germ to cooked cereals.
- Use high fiber cereals to make cookies or muffins.
- Add oatmeal or bran cereal to meat loaf.
- Have a small bowl of high fiber cereal.

High Fiber Cereals and Approximate Fiber Content		
Food	Serving	Grams
Fiber One® or All Bran®	1/3 cup	8.5
Kashi® Go Lean	¾ cup	7.0-9.0
Bran, 100%	¼ cup	7.0
Multi-bran Chex®	¾ cup	6.0
Quaker Oatmeal Squares	¾ cup	6.0
Barbara's Puffins Original®	¾ cup	5.0
Frosted Mini Wheats®	¾ cup	5.0
Oatmeal, old fashion, dry	½ cup	4.0
Raisin Bran®	½ cup	4.0
Honey Nut Clusters®	1 cup	3.0
Oatmeal, instant, original	1 packet	3.0
Grape Nuts®	¼ cup	2.5
Cream of Wheat®, instant	1 packet	2.0-3.0
Cheerios®, multigrain	2/3 cup	2.0
Cheerios® Original	1 cup	3.0

Cheerios® Honey-Nut	1 cup	2.0
Cracklin' Oat Bran®	½ cup	2.0
Grape Nut® Flakes	½ cup	2.0
Quaker® "Life"	¾ cup	2.0
Raisin Bran Crunch®	½ cup	2.0
Wheaties®	2/3 cup	2.0
Post Shredded Wheat®	½ cup	2.5

## Recipes

### Oatmeal-Raisin Muffins

1 c rolled oats  
 1 c buttermilk  
 1 c whole wheat flour  
 1 ½ tsp baking powder  
 ½ tsp baking soda  
 ¼ c applesauce  
 2 tsp. salt  
 ¼ c oil  
 ½ c packed brown sugar  
 1 large egg, beaten  
 ½ cup raisins\*

In a large bowl combine the oats and buttermilk, let stand for 30 min. Preheat oven to 350°F. In a small bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt and set aside. After oats have soaked, stir oil, sugar and eggs into oat mixture and blend well. Stir in flour mixture and raisins to moisten. Do not over mix. Divide batter among 12 greased muffin cups (about ¾ full). Bake 25 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center of muffin comes out clean. Makes 1 dozen muffins. **\*Can also use chopped apricots, craisins, or chopped nuts.**

### Low Fat Blueberry-Bran Pancakes

1 c Fiber One® or All Bran Cereal®  
 2 egg whites or 1 egg  
 1 ¼ c skim milk  
 1 Tbsp vegetable oil  
 1 c all-purpose flour  
 2 Tbsp sugar  
 1 tsp baking powder  
 1 tsp baking soda  
 1 tsp salt  
 ½ cup fresh or frozen blueberries or 1 can, drained

Crush cereal. Beat egg whites or egg in medium bowl. Stir in milk, oil, and cereal. Let stand 5 minutes or until cereal is softened. Stir in the rest of the ingredients except blueberries. Beat with wire whisk until smooth. Gently stir in blueberries. Heat griddle or skillet over medium heat or to 375°F. Grease griddle if needed. Pour about ¼ c batter for each pancake. If batter is too thick, stir in more milk, 1 Tbsp. at a time. Cook pancakes until puffed and full of bubbles but before bubbles break. Turn and cook other side until golden brown. Makes 10 (5 inch) pancakes.

### Prune Chocolate Chip Cookies

1 c pureed prunes (see recipe)  
 1 ½ c sugar  
 2 eggs or 4 egg whites  
 2-1/2 c whole wheat flour  
 ½ tsp salt  
 1 tsp vanilla  
 1 tsp baking soda  
 1 (12 oz) bag chocolate chips  
 1 c walnuts

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix pureed prunes, sugar, eggs and vanilla until well blended. Combine flour, baking soda and salt in separate bowl. Stir in dry ingredients to prune mixture with a heavy spoon (this makes a heavy dough). Add chocolate chips and nuts. Spoon by the tablespoon onto a

greased cookie sheet. Bake for 10-12 minutes. Remove from pan right away and cool on a flat surface. Makes 4 dozen cookies. 100 calories and 1.5 grams of fiber per cookie.

### **Prune Fudge Brownies**

½ c baby food prunes or Lighter Bake fruit puree  
½ to 1 c sugar  
2 eggs or 4 egg whites  
1 tsp vanilla  
½ c cocoa powder  
¾ c whole wheat flour  
½ tsp baking powder  
½ c walnuts

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix pureed prunes, eggs and vanilla. Stir in dry ingredients. Pour into greased 8" x 8" x 2" pan. Bake for 25-30 minutes. Makes 12 brownies. 120 calories and 2.6 grams of fiber per brownie.

### **Peanut Butter Chocolate Chip Crunchers**

2 c All Bran or Fiber One cereal  
¾ c packed brown sugar  
½ c peanut butter  
¼ c. margarine, softened  
1 egg or 2 egg whites  
¾ c all-purpose flour  
½ tsp baking powder  
½ tsp baking soda  
6 ounces chocolate chips (or dried fruit)

Heat oven to 375°F. Crush cereal (place in plastic bag and crush with rolling pin or blend in food processor). Mix brown sugar, peanut butter, margarine and egg in a large bowl. Stir in the rest of the ingredients. Drop by rounded teaspoonful about 2 inches apart onto greased cookie sheet. Flatten in

crisscross pattern with fork dipped in sugar. Bake 6 to 7 minutes or until light brown around edges. Let stand about 1 minute before taking off the sheet. Makes about 3 dozen cookies.

### **Who to Call**

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions, please call UW Health at the phone number listed below. You can also visit our website at

[www.uwhealth.org/nutrition](http://www.uwhealth.org/nutrition)

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children's Hospital (AFCH) can be reached at: **(608) 890-5500**.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©2/2024 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#196