

HELP, MY CHILD IS CONSTIPATED

12 Simple First Steps

You are not alone in your concern. Constipation represents one-quarter of all visits to pediatric gastroenterologists (GIKids.org) As a functional medicine nutrition consultant, focusing on root causes of any abnormality is key to my plan of action. I can understand your concern and your desire to help your child have healthy bowel movements, and I am also pretty sure that you too want to get to the root of the problem. You don't want just a band-aid fix of physician prescribed laxatives. I hope the following information is helpful. Never try a few things and give up. If they do not work, it simply means we need to dig deeper. The following information is not an exhaustive work. If these suggestions fail, we will do some testing to help us determine the root cause, but I like to start with simple first steps and move on if they do not bring the results we are looking for. I will depend on you to let me know how things are going and if you need further assistance or help.

1 WATER



A young child needs at least three 8 ounce glasses daily. But have you ever tried (oh wait, I'm sure you have:) making a kid drink plain water. Many balk at the thought of having to drink plain water. Get creative, but don't add sugar to the water. Think about keeping lots of fruit on hand. I love good watery fruits like oranges, grapes, watermelon, etc. A double win here with fiber and water from the fruit. A good anytime treat is all fruit ice pops, no sugar added. How about adding some flavor to the water like trying Stur brand liquid water enhancer. I like the strawberry-watermelon flavor. Just squirt some in a glass. The sweetness in this water enhancer is from Stevia, one of my preferred sweeteners.

2 FIBER



The all-time favorite advice is to just add more fiber. Fiber is good and I agree that fiber needs to be increased but not at the beginning of treatment as it can make constipation worse. Once the issue is resolved, then gradually increase fiber. If the child is not getting enough fiber from foods, please consider a child's fiber supplement that is mixed into water or juice, usually one teaspoon to start and increasing to 1 teaspoon 3 times daily. Fiber works to scrap the colon lining keeping it clean, so the goal after constipation is resolved is to make sure your child getting adequate fiber. Shoot for a goal of at least the child's age plus 5 grams of fiber per day (American Academy of Pediatrics). For instance, if your child is 5 years old then $5+5=10$ grams of fiber per day. Good food sources are veggies, fruits, beans, legumes, whole grains.



3 EXERCISE

Movement is important. It takes movement (peristalsis) in the digestive tract to push the food along, so exercise of any sort will carry over to good bowel movement as well.

4 TEACH GOOD BOWEL HABITS



Start your day with 8 ounces of water (room temperature or warm) Have your child sit on the toilet faithfully every morning for about 10 minutes. They can read a book or look at pictures. Have a stool so that their feet will not dangle on the toilet. Repetition is key to good bowel habits. Learning how to relax and not feel rushed is important. Assure them that they are not required to poop if they don't have to but just to sit and relax. We don't want any hard pushing or having them think you will be disappointed if they don't produce.

5 FATS



Believe it or not, fats can help with constipation. Consider a tablespoon of any of the following: Olive oil, Coconut Oil, Avocados or Avocado oil, Nut oils, butter or ghee. Consider a smoothie for your child in which you can easily add any of these fats, plus a double win with the excess water a smoothie provides.

6 PROBIOTICS



If dairy sensitivity is suspected then do not use yogurt. If you do, make sure whatever brand you buy says "live or active cultures" on the label. Bubbies brand dill pickles is good or any other fermented veggies your child will eat. I recommend Klaire Labs brand Ther-biotic Children's chewable or Klaire Labs Powdered Infant probiotic. Mix product in juice or sprinkled on food such as apple sauce or cereal

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SUGAR FREE DIET

Sugar upsets the balance of yeast in our gut causing undesirable yeast and bacteria to flourish. Sugar is also inflammatory and dehydrating. Dehydration is a big cause for constipation.

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PRUNES



Prunes are high in insoluble fiber, which adds bulk to your stool, and the type of soluble fiber in prunes pulls water into your colon which can help alleviate constipation.

Prunes are dehydrated so please make sure you have your child drink plenty of water with prunes. Prunes can be stewed with equal parts of applesauce with some added oat bran. Consider baby food prunes which are already stewed for you.

**9**

DIGESTIVE ENZYMES

Take with meals. They increase stool bulk and help relieve constipation. I recommend Transformation Enzymes brand Kidz Digest - 2 with meals and snacks

**10**

ELIMINATION DIET

Most often whatever a child is eating the most is the culprit in constipation and I can almost say without even knowing your child that the top two foods consumed are dairy and gluten. Give it a try. Stay away from dairy and gluten for at least 2 weeks. The market does a good job of catering to this diet and you will find many alternatives. Let me know if you need advice on this and how to reintroduce these foods after the elimination period ends.

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MAGNESIUM



Remember magnesium helps the digestive tract muscles move the food along. There are many forms of magnesium. Try Little DaVinci brand Fizzy Mag - 1 scoop. If this doesn't resolve constipation, give two scoops, and keep adding until you see results. You know you have given too much if diarrhea happens. Find the perfect dose that gives good results.

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VITAMIN C



Vitamin C will soften the stool. You can give this to bowel tolerance just like the magnesium above. The dosage will vary according to the child's need. I recommend Innate Response brand C Complete Powder which can be added to water and tastes great! Start with one scoop per day. If no good result then try 2 scoops per day. You know you have given too much if diarrhea occurs. A chewable form I recommend is Little DaVinci brand ramping up the dose until bowel tolerance has occurred.

- Please remember with all these suggestions that the number one goal is to eat a nutrient-dense diet that gives your child all he/she needs to have regular bowel movements. That's what you are shooting for. You do not want to be dependent on anything else if possible. Let your food be your medicine.
- Here are recommendations for a nutrient-dense diet:
- Vegetables - especially non-starchy ones, buy in season and locally
- Fruits - especially watery ones
- Fats - Coconut, Olive, Avocado, Nut oils, Good quality animal fats like beef tallow, ghee, butter, chicken/duck fat. Avoid canola, corn, cottonseed, grapeseed, and soybean oils and shortening (these are inflammatory)
- Non-Gluten Whole grains - oats, quinoa, sorghum, buckwheat, corn, brown rice
- Protein - Good humanely raised grass-fed animal sources. Who wants to eat an unhealthy diseased antibiotic laden animal?
- Best sugar substitutes - Stevia, Monk Fruit, Allulose, Erythritol
- Dairy substitutes - nut milks (coconut milk will add good fat and is anti-inflammatory-great to add to smoothies), rice milk, Daiya brand cheese. Avoid soy milk.