

Constipation in Pregnancy



Constipation and bloating can affect up to forty percent of women during pregnancy. This can last six to twelve weeks after you have given birth.

How?

During pregnancy your gut movement can be reduced, this increases the length of time your stool (poo) stays in your body. This can lead to constipated and/or excess gas and bloat.

Why?

Constipation in pregnancy can happen because of

- Changes in the level of hormones which help your gut to move,
- Your growing baby/babies taking up extra space inside your body,
- Some pregnancy medications such as iron tablets,
- Reduced exercise or activity in pregnancy or, if recommended, a period of bed rest which both reduces the natural stimulation of your gut muscles to move.

"The longer stool stays in your body, the more water your body will absorb – this will result in a dryer stool which can be difficult to pass"








What is normal?

How often you pass a stool is different for everyone, most people pass a stool between

three times a day and three times a week. When you pass a stool less often or it changes in texture from your "normal", you may be constipated.

A normal bowel motion should be well formed, soft and easy to pass, like type three and four on the chart below.

Bristol Stool Chart

Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
Type 2		Sausage-shaped but lumpy
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on its surface
Type 4		Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
Type 5		Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (passed easily)
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces. Entirely Liquid

Reference: Heaton, K W & Lewis, S J 1997, 'Stool form scale as a useful guide to intestinal transit time'. Scandinavian Journal of Gastroenterology, vol.32, no.9, pp.920 - 924.

Prevention and treatment

A **healthy diet** containing plenty of different **fibre** rich foods, lots of **liquids** as well as **exercise** is recommended to keep your bowels healthy and regular.

What is fibre?

Fibre is a type of carbohydrate that is not digested or absorbed in the gut.

How does it work?

- Fibre works by stimulating micro-organisms in your gut, this over time increases
- the bulk and size of your stool. The larger your stool, the more your muscles are
- stimulated to move it through your gut.
- Fibre also acts by absorbing water forming a gel. This can make you feel fuller
- for long as well as increasing the softness of your stool.



Why is it good for me?

- Fibre helps to bulk and soften your stool making it easy to pass.
- Taking in enough fibre has been shown to reduce your risk of colon cancer,
- high cholesterol and heart disease as well as helping to control your blood
- sugar in diabetes.
- It also helps the growth of good bacteria in your gut which can be useful in
- treating irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).



"Eight out of ten Irish people don't take enough fibre"

How much fibre do I need?

It is recommended to eat **30g of total fibre every day** to support normal digestion and health.

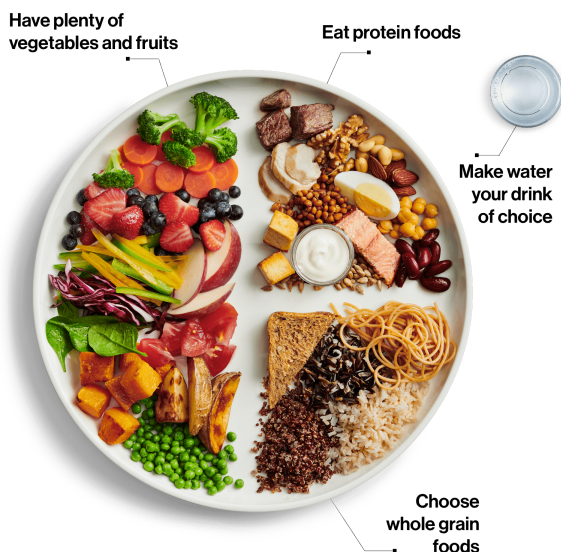
Where do I get it?

Eat more wholegrains

- Switch to a high fibre/whole grain cereal – look for
- cereals with 6g of fibre per 100g of cereal (or more);
- weetabix, shredded wheat, All bran, jumbo porridge oats,
- oatabix or bran flakes. If you find this difficult try mixing a
- high fibre/multigrain cereal with your usual cereal.
- Choose wholegrain bread, rice, pasta instead of white
- types.

Eat more plants!

- Include between five and seven portions of vegetables,
- salads and fruit mixed throughout your day. Fill half your
- plate with vegetables at lunch and dinner.
- Wash instead of peeling fruit or vegetables to get the
- most fibre from them.



- One portion of fruit/vegetables is; one apple/orange/pear/banana; two plums/kiwis/mandarin
- oranges; six strawberries; ten grapes; sixteen raspberries; half cup of fresh/frozen vegetables; one
- bowl of salad without dressing; one bowl of homemade vegetable chunky soup.

How to add more fibre

Try some fibre boosters

Make the switch from white to wholegrain bread.
Your gut will thank you.

Add flavour and texture to your favourite tinned or home-made soup by stirring in cooked pearl barley, beans, peas and vegetables.

Add porridge oats to your yogurt – a delicious crunch with no cooking necessary.

Making meatballs? Replace a third of the mince with uncooked oats.

Keep the skin on your fruit and vegetables; this saves you fibre and time.

Baking puddings? Replace one third of the flour with quick oats.

Up the fibre in your next fry or grill with a serving of beans, mushrooms and a grilled tomato.

Sprinkle mixed nuts and seeds on your breakfast: it's always a winner on cereal and omelettes.

Boost your bolognese sauce: replace half the meat with beans/pea/mushrooms or other vegetables.

In a rush? Frozen vegetables are a convenient addition to any meal.

Banish those hungry feelings: with a handful (30g) of nuts, seed or dried fruit combined.

Planning a movie night in? Trade in those crisps for homemade popcorn.
Remember to take it easy on the salt and sugar.
Try seasoning with rosemary and garlic powder instead.



*if you have gestational diabetes some of these foods may not be suitable, please talk with your dietitian.

Note:

- In some cases you may need extra medications to help with your constipation. Talk to your doctor or midwife if you have any concerns.
- While high fibre foods can improve your gut please note that high fibre can affect the body's ability to absorb natural iron from foods. If this is a concern of yours please discuss with your doctor/midwife.

What is a high fibre menu*

Porridge made with 40g oats, 150ml low fat milk topped with 4 dried apricots and half a handful (15g) almonds. **(7g fibre)**

xxx

2 falafel, 2 dessert spoons of hummous (30g) with green salad in a wholewheat wrap. **(10g fibre)**

xxx

Spaghetti bolognese, replacing half the meat with 50g of drained tinned mixed beans. Use wholewheat spaghetti (50g dry weight). **(9g fibre)**

xxx

Snack: 3 portions of fruit spread throughout the day **(7.5-8g fibre)**

Drinks: 2-2.5L of water

2 wholegrain slices of toast, thinly spread with peanut butter (30g) **(8g fibre)**

xxx

One large jacket potato (250g) plus 3 tbsp sweetcorn (80g) with tuna and melted low fat cheese **(9g fibre)**

xxx

3 tbsp broccoli (80g), 3 tbsp carrots (80g) and 5 baby new potatoes served with a main meal meat **(9g fibre)**

xxx

Snack: 1/2 cup almonds **(9g fibre)**

Drinks: 2-2.5L of fluid

2 breakfast wheat biscuits (40g) served with (125ml) low fat milk topped with a small handful (28g) of hazelnuts.

(6g fibre)

xxx

A small serving (150g) reduced sugar baked beans served on low GI bread. **(9g fibre)**

xxx

1 cup of peas, 1 cup of carrots, 1 medium potato with the skin & chicken/fish **(9g fibre)**

xxx

Snack: 3 tinned prunes served 1 tsp milled linseed with 125g high fibre, low sugar yogurt. **(8g fibre)**

Drinks: 2-2.5L of fluid

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Anything else I need to know??

Start slowly and drink enough liquid.

- Suddenly switching from a low fibre diet to a high fibre diet can have some side effects. The large increase in fibre can cause cramping and extra wind which can make you uncomfortable.
- Because of this it is important to introduce higher fibre foods slowly over the course of two to three weeks depending on how low your fibre intake was before.

Fibre and fluid



- Fibre works by absorbing liquid in the gut into your stools. If you are increasing your fibre intake it is important to increase your liquid intake as well.
- Aim for two and a half litres of liquid in the day, this includes water, low fat milk, no added sugar cordials and a maximum of 150mls fruit juice per day.
- Checking the colour of your urine is a simple way to see if you are drinking enough.
- Urine should be a pale yellow colour, if it is dark, you need to drink more fluid.

"If you are passing clear urine throughout the day, it is likely that you are drinking enough"

What about linseed?

- For those who don't like, or enjoy large amounts of the high fibre foods mentioned above a good source of extra fibre is linseed, (also known as flaxseed). This comes as seeds or flakes (milled linseed).
- Choose plain unflavoured milled linseed to avoid extra calories and sugar in your diet. Golden, brown and organic milled linseed all have the same amount of fibre.
- Plain milled linseed can be mixed in with smoothies, yogurts, cereals, stews, porridge, mashed potato, mashed banana, curry's, lasagne, sauces or pancakes. It has no taste.
- Start by slowly increasing the amount of linseed included in your meals to gain fibre benefit - every two teaspoons (tsp) of linseed give you 2.5g of fibre.
- As you increase your linseed you may need to increase the fluid that you drink; check your urine colour throughout the day and use this as a guide, the darker it is the more fluid you may need to drink.
 - Day 1 - Add 2 tsp at breakfast
 - Day 3 - Add 2 tsp at breakfast and bedtime
 - Day 5 - Add 2 tsp at breakfast, evening and bedtime



How much is enough?

- Increase the amount of linseed every day until
- you have to move a stool every day or one to two times a day.
- Stools should be big, soft and comfortable to pass requiring no straining.
- You may experience an increase in wind. When this starts happening you can stop increasing the amount of linseed you have and stick with the serving that is working for you.