

Constipation in Children

A guide for families.



Understanding Constipation

Constipation is common — as many as 1 in 3 children experience it at some point. It means hard, painful, or infrequent stools, not simply going less often. A child who goes every few days but has soft, comfortable stools is usually fine.

Watch for: Hard or pebble-like stools, pain or straining, fewer than 3 stools per week, large stools that clog the toilet, belly pain, or stool accidents.

Why Kids Hold It In

After one hard or painful bowel movement, children may start holding in stool to avoid the pain. This makes the next stool harder and more painful, creating a cycle. Holding can look like straining, but the child is actually clenching to keep stool in. Breaking this cycle often requires a stool softener, not just diet changes.

When to Call Your Allegro Provider

Call us if your child has:

- Constipation and is under 4 months old
- Hard stools with straining as a newborn
- Blood in the stool or ongoing belly pain
- Vomiting, weight loss, or poor weight gain
- Stool accidents after being toilet trained
- No improvement after 2 weeks of following the steps below

Treating Constipation

When a child is already constipated, fiber-rich foods alone usually aren't enough to fix it. Adding a lot of fiber at once can also make discomfort worse.

A stool softener such as polyethylene glycol (MiraLAX) is often used to treat constipation. Your child's provider will recommend the appropriate dose. Use the foods and habits below to support healthy, regular bowel movements over time alongside your child's treatment plan.

Keep treatment going. Constipation can return when stool softeners are stopped too soon. Continue treatment and lower the dose gradually only as directed by your child's provider.

Everyday Habits That Help

Toilet routine: Have your child sit on the toilet for 5–10 minutes after meals with their feet supported on a stool. A small reward for sitting — not just for having a bowel movement — can help build the habit.

Fluids: Offer water throughout the day. Limit cow's milk to about 16–24 oz per day, as large amounts can worsen constipation.

Fiber: Increase fiber-rich foods gradually to help avoid gas and bloating.

How Much Fiber? (a guide, not a calculation)

A simple goal: your child's age + 5 = grams of fiber per day.

For example, a 6-year-old would aim for about 11 grams per day. You don't need to count every gram or hit the exact number every day. Focus on offering a variety of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, and seeds.

When reading labels, foods with 2 or more grams of fiber per serving are good sources to count toward the goal.

High Fiber Foods from Many Kitchens

Fiber comes in foods from every cuisine. The list below mixes familiar staples with foods common across our community — all of them work the same way for every child. Choose the ones your family enjoys.

Category	Foods (grams of fiber per serving in parentheses)
Grains	Oats/oatmeal (4), bulgur (8), teff/injera (7), quinoa (5), barley (6), brown rice (3.5), whole-wheat roti/chapati (2–3), whole-grain bread (2–3)
Fruits	Dried figs/dates (12), guava (9), avocado ½ (6.5), pear w/skin (5.5), apple w/skin (4.5), prunes 4–5 (3), papaya (2.5–3), mango (2.5), jackfruit (2.5)
Vegetables	Laing/taro leaves (~6), cooked greens (4), kangkong (~3), carrots (3), squash (2.5), eggplant (2.5), bok choy (1.7)
Starchy vegetables	Taro/gabi (6.5), yams (5), sweet potato/kamote w/skin (4), potato w/skin (4), plantain (3), corn 1 ear (2)
Beans & legumes	Lentils/dal (15), mung beans/mongo (15), black/kidney/pinto beans (15), chickpeas/garbanzos (12), black-eyed peas (8–10), edamame (8), rajma (7)
Nuts & seeds	Chia 2 tbsp (10), almonds 1 oz (4), flax 1 tbsp ground (3), peanuts 1 oz (3)

Good to know: Plain yogurt contains little fiber but can be part of a balanced diet. Ghee and ginger are not significant sources of fiber. Fiber amounts are approximate.

Offer in moderation: No food is off-limits, but large amounts of cow’s milk and cheese, highly processed snacks, and low-fiber foods such as white rice, white bread, and peeled potatoes may contribute to constipation.