

Constipation in Pregnancy

Why am I suddenly constipated?

Are you feeling bloated, sluggish or are struggling to go to the toilet? Constipation is very common in pregnancy and nearly 40% of women report symptoms of constipation at some stage of their pregnancy¹. This is because some hormones released during pregnancy can cause the small bowel to work more slowly, meaning food does not move as quickly through our digestive system.

As the baby grows, it can also start to push on your bowel, which can cause discomfort and some difficulty going to the toilet. This feeling can be extremely uncomfortable, but can be easily treated.

How can I help my constipation?

There are many different things your doctor will suggest to help your constipation. One of those is to increase your fibre intake.

Fibre acts like a scrubbing brush for your insides pushing food through the intestines on the way to being eliminated.

Fibre also plays a role in helping you feel fuller, managing blood sugars and keeping the good bugs in your intestines happy so they can keep you healthy.

How much fibre do I need?²

Women ages 19+:

25 grams per day

During Pregnancy:

28 grams per day

Where does fibre come from?

Fibre comes from plant foods and is the part that is not entirely digested. This means it makes it all the way to the lower bowel where it works to keep you regular.

30g of high fibre cereal



4–13g

1 medium apple



3g

½ cup of cooked broccoli



3g

1 slice wholemeal bread



2g

½ cup of cooked oats



4g

½ cup of cooked lentils



4g

30g of almonds



4g

Small baked potato (with skin)



3g

Did you know?

While all fibres are great, the ones that come from grains are the best for helping with constipation!

Research shows that insoluble fibre, especially that found in wheat bran is the most effective for helping to relieve symptoms of constipation.³ This is because it helps bulk up your stool more effectively than other types of fibre. Insoluble fibre is found mostly in fruit and vegetable skins and in the outer layer of grains (bran). For starters, try including small amounts of high fibre grain foods at every meal. Remember, any improvement is great!

Serving sizes have been adapted from the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating, 2013. New Zealand serving sizes are similar.

Kellogg's
Nutrition



Did you know?

Most foods high in fibre are naturally high in vitamins and minerals that are important during pregnancy!

Folate is a B vitamin that is needed in larger amounts during pregnancy. This is because it is involved in development of DNA, red blood cells and tissue growth.

Foods, such as breakfast cereals are mostly fortified with folate and many are sources of fibre. Green vegetables, such as broccoli are also good sources of fibre and folate.

Stool softeners can also help

Stool softeners work by encouraging water to move into the bowel. This will help make your stool much softer and easier to pass. This does not mean if you are taking a stool softener, that you should reduce your fibre intake! They work very well together. It is good to always start with fibre to try relieve your constipation symptoms and if they persist speak to your GP or dietitian about using a stool softener.

Keep the skin on

Fibre comes mostly from the skin or outer layer of foods. Peeling an apple or a potato before you eat it will reduce its fibre content. Wholegrains found in cereals and breads are high in fibre as they still contain the outer layer of the grain. This is why standard white breads are lower in fibre, as the outer layer of the grain is not included!

Quick Tips:

- Eat a balance of foods with fibre each day including vegetables, fruit, breakfast cereal, whole grain products, nuts and legumes.
- When increasing your fibre intake make sure to drink water too.
- Try to walk or do another safe exercise (advised by your physician) every day.
- Try eating smaller meals more frequently to avoid putting pressure on your bowel.
- Sometimes stool softeners are necessary. Talk to your GP for more information and guidance.

Your Health Professional Recommends

Having constipation during pregnancy is completely normal!
Even small increases in your fibre can help to relieve symptoms.

1 Gartland D et al. ANZJOG 2010; 50; 413-418.

2 NHMRC. Nutrient Reference Values for Australia and New Zealand 2005, Canberra.

3 Vuksan, V et al. Am J Clin Nutr 2008; 88; 1256-1262.

Disclaimer: These fact sheets are not meant to replace dietary advice provided by your doctor or dietitian. Please consult with your doctor or dietitian before making changes to your diet or physical activity routine.