

Constipation in Pregnancy

Constipation is a common problem for women during pregnancy and often after childbirth. Pregnancy hormones can slow down your digestion, meaning stools can take longer to pass. This can cause constipation, excess gas and bloating. Some medications e.g. iron tablets as well as being less active can further slow your gut down.

The 3 'F's' can help to combat constipation in pregnancy:

Fibre + Fluids + Fitness

1. Eating a high fibre diet:

Fibre is a type of carbohydrate that is not digested or absorbed in the body. It absorbs fluid and therefore helps to make our stools soft and more bulky (easier to pass). Eating enough fibre has been shown to reduce the risk of colon cancer, high cholesterol and heart disease and can help to control your blood sugar levels. It also helps the growth of good bacteria in your gut which can be useful in treating irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Because of the hormonal changes which cause your gut to slow down in pregnancy, your fibre requirement increases. It is recommended that you eat 28g of dietary fibre every day.

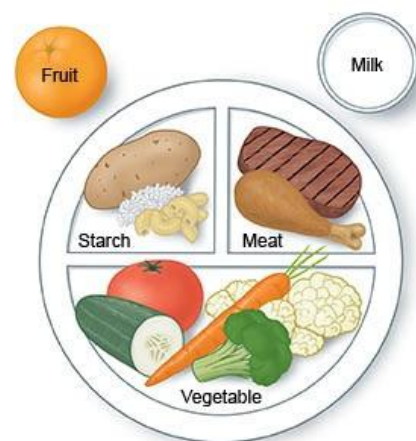
Top tips to increase fibre intake:

- Choose wholegrain carbohydrates at each meal

Good carbohydrate food to choose:	
Wholegrain or wholemeal breads, wraps, pita bread, chapatti	High fibre cereal e.g. Porridge, Shredded Wheat, Weetabix, Bran, Muesli, Granola
Boiled, baked potatoes or sweet potatoes with their skin	Wholegrain noodles (not instant or "Pot Noodles")
Whole-wheat pasta	Wholewheat cous cous, quinoa or wholegrain rice







Choose cereals that contain 6g of fibre per 100g of cereal.

- Include 5-7 servings of fruit and vegetables every day.
 - Aim to have ½ your plate made up of fruit or vegetables at each main meal.
 - Keep the skins on fruit and vegetables where possible.
 - Snack on fruit or raw vegetable sticks.
 - Boost fibre in your meals by adding beans, lentils, chickpeas, nuts and seeds.
 - Try including one glass (150mls) of prune juice each day. Dried prunes are also good to try!



- **Eat Regular Meals and Snacks**

In order to fit all the fibre you need into your day, aim to eat three main meals with 2-3 nourishing snacks per day in between your meals. Never skip a meal.

Sample times for regular meals and snacks:					
					
Breakfast	Snack	Lunch	Snack	Dinner	Snack

- **Milled flax or linseeds**

Flaxseed, Milled flax and linseed are an excellent source of fibre and for many women can help to improve constipation. These can be added to cereal, porridge, yoghurt, puree fruit or smoothies. You will need an extra small glass (150mls) of fluid with each tablespoon of linseeds taken.

It is recommended that you start with a small amount of milled flax or linseed daily and increase the amount of milled flax or linseeds slowly every two days. Start with a small amount (2 teaspoons)

Days	Amount of Linseed
Days 1 & 2	2 teaspoons at breakfast
Days 3 & 4	2 teaspoons at breakfast + before bed
Days 5 & 6	2 teaspoons at breakfast + evening meal + before bed
Days 7 & 8	3 teaspoons at breakfast + 2 teaspoons at evening meal + before bed
Days 9 & 10	3 teaspoons at breakfast + evening meal + 2 teaspoons before bed
Days 11 & 12	3 teaspoons at breakfast + evening meal + before bed

How do I know how much is enough?

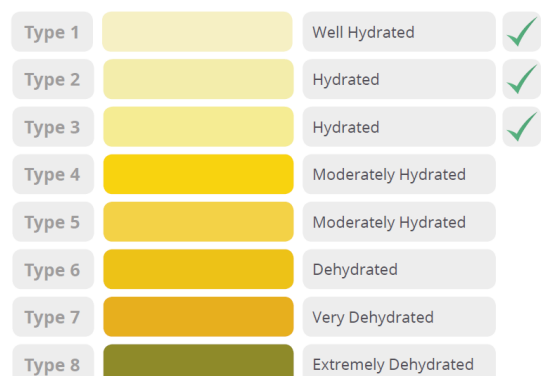
Stop increasing and continue with the amount that

- Helps you pass a stool each day
- Makes your stools soft and comfortable to pass.

You may experience an increase in the amount of wind you pass.

2. Drinking enough fluid:

- Fibre needs to absorb water in order to pass through your body.
- If you are increasing your fibre intake it's important to increase fluids too!
- Drink water, sparkling water, milk, 100% fruit juice or no added sugar cordial.
- If your urine is clear in colour it's a good sign you are drinking enough water.



3. Fitness:

When we exercise we increase blood flow around the body – this includes our bowels!

Aim for 30-45 minutes gentle exercise per day. Always ask your doctor or midwife if you are starting a new exercise.

High Fibre Meal Ideas

Remember – Aim to make ½ your plate up from fruit or vegetables!

Breakfast

- Porridge topped with berries/banana and nuts/flaxseed
- Wholegrain toast with scrambled eggs, mushrooms & tomatoes
- Wholegrain cereal e.g. Weetabix, All Bran, or Shredded Wheat with fruit and seeds
- Wholegrain toast with nut butter and banana
- Beans on toast
- Overnight oats

And 1 glass of fortified orange/prune juice

Lunch

- Wholegrain sandwich/wrap with hummus, falafel and veg / chicken, cheese & salad
- Vegetable/Lentil soup with wholegrain bread + a piece of fruit
- Baked potato topped with beans and cheese or tuna, sweet corn & low fat mayonnaise + side salad
- Wholegrain pasta with tomato sauce, roasted vegetables and mozzarella
- Burrito bowl – Brown rice, lettuce, tomatoes, sweet corn, black beans, chicken & guacamole/salsa

Dinner

- Stir-fry with toasted cashew nuts and wholegrain noodles
- Chicken & chickpea curry with brown rice
- Homemade burger in wholegrain bun, homemade potato wedges (with skins) & side salad
- Chili non-carne (add kidney beans and/or lentils) with rice and guacamole
- Lentil dahl with brown rice and a side of veg
- Meat/chicken with baby boiled potatoes (with skin), carrots & broccoli (or 2 veg of your choice!)

Snacks ideas:

- Yogurt with berries & chopped nuts
- Piece of fruit
- Wholegrain crackers & small portion of cheese
- Trail mix (nuts & dried fruit)
- Hummus and vegetable sticks/wholegrain pitta
- Oat cakes with banana and peanut butter or avocado
- Small bowl of homemade vegetable or lentil soup
- Chia seed pudding