



## Eat Your Greens with Dr. Black | plant-based nutrition for the whole family

Constipation is usually defined as having infrequent, hard stools that are difficult or painful to pass, and is a common problem for both adults and children alike. It can have many causes, including medication side effects, diseases of the gut like irritable bowel syndrome, and hormone disorders such as hypothyroidism. Untreated constipation is a frequent contributor to bed wetting and urinary tract infections, and can lead to problems such as fissures (tears in the tissue that are painful and cause blood in the stool), hemorrhoids, and soiling accidents (also called encopresis).

### **The most common cause of constipation is eating a low-fiber diet.**

Fiber is a type of carbohydrate and is found only in food that comes from plants. It acts by drawing more water into the stool to make it softer. Fiber adds bulk to the stool so it is easier to pass. The health benefits of fiber go beyond making it easier to use the toilet: among other things, dietary fiber has been shown to reduce the risks of heart disease and colon cancer, and can help control blood sugar in diabetes.

When foods are processed, the fiber is stripped out leaving only the starchy carbohydrate which binds up the stool and causes constipation. Many important vitamins are also removed during processing.

Some foods you can give your child to relieve constipation include:

- Fruit - especially pears, kiwi, grapes, oranges, peaches, and plums
- Dried fruit
- Vegetables - especially green leafy veggies like spinach and kale, broccoli, and peas
- Beans, lentils, and other legumes
- Oatmeal
- Whole grains like brown rice, quinoa, farro, and barley
- Don't forget to drink plenty of water to help the fiber in your diet do its job better.

To prevent constipation, offer fewer binding foods such as:

- Milk and cheese
- White bread, crackers, and pasta made with refined white flour
- Chips, cookies, and puffs
- White rice
- Sugary baked goods
- High fat processed meat like sausage, bacon, and hot dogs (these foods have been strongly linked to cancer, so avoid them even if you're not constipated!)



## Eat Your Greens with Dr. Black | plant-based nutrition for the whole family

Offering plenty of whole plant-based foods is the best way to prevent constipation. If your child already goes several days between BMs or has hard, pellet-like stools, they may need to start taking a stool softener to help relieve the problem while you work to incorporate more fiber-rich foods into their diet. If they have soiling accidents - even if the soiling looks like diarrhea - they may have a more serious form of constipation called encopresis. Talk to your doctor about which stool softener they recommend and other ways to treat this chronic issue.

Using the bathroom doesn't have to be a painful ordeal. Be sure to read [Top Tips for Picky Eaters](#) to learn how to get your child eat more healthy fiber-rich foods. Search the internet for delicious plant-based recipes and have fun letting your children help with meal planning and preparation. As a bonus, I've added my favorite recipe for a fiber-packed breakfast smoothie below. Enjoy!

### **Dr. Black's Breakfast Smoothie**

I drink this delicious smoothie for breakfast several times per week. It has about 18 grams of fiber and is a great way to sneak in some green veggies, too. Feel free to change up the fruit: mango, kiwi, peaches, and bananas are great substitutes. Add the ingredients to your blender and blend on high speed for 2-3 minutes. Enjoy!

- 1 cup mixed berries (My favorites are blackberries and blueberries, but raspberries and strawberries work well too. Note: red berries plus green kale will make a brown smoothie: ignore the color, it still tastes great!)
- 1/2 apple
- 1/2 cup frozen pineapple chunks (I buy fresh pineapple chunks and freeze them in a single layer to make it easy to toss a few into the blender)
- 1 cup chopped kale (spinach is good too, but kale is a better source of calcium)
- 1 Tbs flax seeds
- 1 Tbs chia seeds
- 1 tsp psyllium husks (Psyllium husks can be found in most major grocery chains and are a great way to sneak in extra fiber. Add some into pancake or muffin mix, sauces, and smoothies.)
- 1-inch fresh ginger (optional, but I love the zing that ginger adds)
- 1/2 scoop plant-based protein powder (optional)
- 1 1/2 cups liquid such as soy milk, water, or orange juice (I use "Lite" orange juice to reduce the amount of sugar. Soy or other plant-based milk will add protein without the need for protein powder)