



VICTORIAN CONTINENCE RESOURCE CENTRE



Tip sheet: Food, Fluids and Fun!

Eating and drinking well for successful toilet training

Successful toilet training is more likely when your child enjoys a healthy diet and is as physically active as possible. Parents and carers can set an example by eating a variety of nutritious family foods, drinking water regularly and joining their children in active play and other activities.

Look for ways to create a happy, child-friendly eating environment with few distractions. If your child needs assistance with eating or drinking, ask for help from your child's therapists. You may need to talk to a speech pathologist and/or dietician, physiotherapist, or occupational therapist.

Fluids – remember WATER!

Water is important for every system in the body. For example, it is needed to control body temperature (by perspiration), to digest and absorb food, and to help in getting rid of waste (poo and wee). Because water is continually lost from our bodies we need to drink fluids regularly. For both bladder and bowel to work well, the most important dietary factor is regular fluid intake.

Water is the most effective drink, whether tap water or fizzy water (plain mineral water or soda water). Drinks such as cordial, fruit juice, soft drink and 'energy' drinks are not helpful due to their high sugar content. It is best to avoid or limit these drinks, especially for young children.

Although milk is a fluid, it should not be relied on as a main source of water. It is a good idea to avoid too much milk and milk products – more than 500–600ml (about two cups) of milk or its equivalent each day will usually fill up small tummies and limit appetite.

Suggestions for encouraging your child to drink water:

- Drink water with or in front of your child so they see you enjoying it.
- Some children prefer chilled water; others like it warmed.
- Add a squeeze or slice of orange or lemon.
- Keep a jug or bottle of water filled for the children who can help themselves.
- If you do offer fruit juice, limit it to once a day and add a little water to it as if it were cordial: one part juice mixed with at least five parts water. Fizzy water may be more interesting than tap water.

- Buy a novelty type of water bottle for your child and leave it lying around; have one for yourself too. Take them with you when you go out.
- Add different-shaped ice cubes or ice cubes with fruit frozen inside.
- If you do use cordial, use a sugar-free or diet cordial made up to a very weak concentration. Diet products contain sweeteners such as sorbitol which can irritate the bowel and cause diarrhoea when taken often or in large amounts.
- You could try adding a dash of food colouring to make water look like cordial.

Children who have good daily water intake will produce good amounts of wee and their poo will be soft so they are less likely to become constipated. Constipation not only affects the passing of poo but can lead to tummy discomfort and loss of appetite (see the tip sheet *Constipation*).

Family foods

Your child will be well nourished if a variety of foods is offered through a balanced family diet which includes foods from all four food groups and includes enough fibre and water. The four food groups are: breads and cereals; fruit and vegetables; milk and milk products; protein foods including meat, fish, poultry, eggs, and legumes such as beans and peas and nuts.

As a parent or carer you have the responsibility to buy, store and prepare a variety of nutritious foods for your child. You should offer them regular small meals or snacks from all the food groups. It is your child's responsibility to decide whether and how much to eat.

Fibre is the part of plant foods which the human digestive system cannot break down; it passes through the bowel almost unchanged, depending on the type. Fibre is present in different forms in food. Cereal products are rich in one type while fruit and vegetables are usually rich in a different type of fibre. It is important to eat some of each every day.

Wholemeal cereal or grain products contain bran which absorbs water to increase the bulk and softness of the poo and helps the poo move through the bowel. Remember, unprocessed bran is NOT recommended for young children.

Aim to offer different breads and cereal products every day, and choose wholemeal where possible. The following are examples of cereal and grain products your child may enjoy:

- sliced bread, bread rolls
- bagels
- pita bread, chapatti
- toasted crumpets, muffins
- scones, pikelets
- porridge oats, ready-to-eat breakfast cereals, muesli products
- crackers, crispbreads, breadsticks (grissini)
- pasta, rice.

Fruit and vegetables contain many nutrients as well as fibre. They are usually a good source of water, which may make up about 70–95% of the fruit or vegetable, depending on the variety and method of preparation (raw, cooked, canned).

Children may be encouraged to eat small servings throughout the day as part of their meals and snacks. The following are some suggestions for making fruit and vegetables attractive to children.

- Almost any fruit or vegetable may be eaten raw if the child has the skills to do so. Raw vegetables will usually have a more pleasant, sweeter taste than the familiar cooked taste which may be less liked by younger members of the family.
- Raw or cooked versions may be made safe for younger or less able children by grating or blending.
- Serve salad vegetables on a plate rather than mixed together in a bowl.
- Make soups such as pumpkin, chicken and sweet corn, lentil. Use a blender to grind the vegetables if your child prefers smooth soups.
- Share a plate of cut-up fruit or vegetables; served with a simple dip such as yoghurt or cream cheese.
- Make fruit kebabs threaded on icy pole sticks.
- Offer dried fruit such as sultanas, apricot, peaches, pears, pawpaw, banana.
- Blend fruit with milk and/or yoghurt to make fruit smoothies.
- Make vegetable patties.
- Try adding mashed banana, stewed or grated apple, berries, or dried fruit to home-made muffins.
- Serve vegetables with cheese sauce or topped with grated cheese.
- Include grated or small pieces of vegetable in casseroles, hamburger, pasta sauce, meatloaf.

Nuts and nut products are nutritious foods which contain good amounts of fibre. If tolerated, they may be eaten by older children – plain, chopped or as ground nutmeal (almond, walnut) added to cereal, salad, fruit or yoghurt or as spreads/butters on bread and crackers, or as dips.

Note: Processed fruit products such as fruit sticks, fruit bars, fruit leathers or roll ups are generally not suitable choices for fruit because they contain high amounts of sugars. These foods are dried so do not provide any fluid.

Remember – do not give whole or chopped nuts to young children as they can easily be inhaled, causing choking.

Activity

Regular physical activity is an important factor for everyone in keeping their bowels healthy. Even gentle exercise, to your child's level of ability, can be helpful in stimulating the abdominal muscles and the bowel. If your child is not walking or needs assistance to move, you can ask a physiotherapist for suggested activities, especially those you can do as a family.

Further information about healthy diet for children and families

- www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au
- www.raisingchildren.net.au
- www.healthyactive.gov.au
- www.freshforkids.com.au
- www.marketfresh.com.au

Information about physical activity for children and families:

- www.sportrec.qld.gov.au/Getactive.aspx
- www.healthyactive.gov.au/internet/healthyactive/publishing.nsf/Content/publications-1
- information fact sheets about the digestive system and how it works: www.gesa.org.au/