

Constipation

Constipation may be a problem during pregnancy. As the baby takes up more room in the body and presses on the intestines, the passage of food through the digestive tract slows down. The pregnancy hormone progesterone also slows down digestion by relaxing body muscles, including those in the intestine. The slow passage of food through the intestines may cause constipation; however, it also allows more nutrients to be absorbed. This helps insure adequate nutrition at a time when your need for nutrients is very high. A decrease in activity and iron supplementation can also contribute to constipation during pregnancy.

Eating a diet rich in fiber and drinking plenty of fluids (eight or more eight-ounce glasses of water) every day can help prevent constipation. Fiber is found in plant foods including fruit, vegetables, dried beans/peas, whole grains, nuts and seeds. It is important to add fiber to your diet gradually to prevent excessive gas or bloating.

Hints for adding fiber to your diet:

1. Choose five or more servings of fruits and vegetables every day. Fresh fruit and raw or steamed vegetables are preferable to canned products.
2. Try to eat the skin or peel of fruits and vegetables whenever possible.
3. Replace refined bread and crackers with whole grain products such as oatmeal, 100% whole wheat, rye or pumpernickel.
4. Select high-fiber breakfast cereals (four or more grams of fiber per serving) such as bran flakes.
5. Add unprocessed wheat bran to cereals, casseroles, hamburgers, and bread and muffin recipes.
6. Try nuts, seeds or dried fruits as snacks.
7. Prepare meals with dried beans and peas such as kidney or navy beans and chickpeas.

If you have questions, a nutrition education specialist is available to help at 508-852-6175 or 1-888-392-0183.