

# Constipation in babies

(Birth to one year)

Bowel routines are different for every baby. Parents or caregivers often worry about the texture, colour or number of their baby's bowel movements. When bowel routines do not meet a parent's expectation of "normal" the baby is often mistakenly described as constipated.

## What is constipation?

Constipation is bowel movements (also called stools) that are:

- Less often than usual
- Hard and dry
- Difficult or painful to pass



Some babies grunt, arch their back, stiffen their legs or turn red in the face when having a bowel movement. This may be normal for some infants, not a sign of constipation.

## Common causes of constipation in babies

- A change from breastmilk to formula
- The introduction of solid foods
- Not enough fluids
- Low fibre intake (in older babies)
- Cow's milk allergy
- Medical conditions or medications



The "normal" number of bowel movements is different for each baby. If bowel movements are soft, the baby is likely not constipated, even if there are several days between each stool.

## Baby's bowel movements are affected by:

### 1. The baby's type of milk feeding

- Breastmilk is easily digested
- From four days after birth breastfed babies have many stools each day
- After 4-6 weeks of age, breastfed babies may not have a stool every day; when they do have a stool, it is soft
- In the first 3-4 months, formula fed babies generally have less stools than breastfed babies
- Formula fed babies generally have more formed stools
- Different brands of formula can make stools different colors and softness

### 2. Changes in the baby's diet

- Changes in the baby's diet can affect the number, texture and color of the stool. Changes may include:
  - Changing from breastmilk to formula or whole milk
  - Changing brands of formula
  - Introducing solid food
  - Transitioning from puréed foods to table foods

### 3. Changes in the baby's age

- A baby has less stools as they get older



## Tips to help with constipation



### For all babies

- Breastfeed or formula feed on demand, at the early signs of hunger
- If breastfeeding, ensure the baby has a proper latch and is feeding well
- If formula feeding, ensure you are making the formula correctly by following the directions on the label of the container
- Ensure your baby is getting adequate fluids. One way to tell is to look at the number of wet diapers and the colour of the urine. A baby should have at least six heavy wet diapers every day and the urine should be light yellow to colourless

### For babies over six months

- When offering solid foods, offer breastmilk or formula first and solid foods no longer than 15-20 minutes after. Try not to wait too long after the milk feeding to offer solid food as this may delay the next milk feeding and the infant may take in less total fluids
- Include foods that contain fibre in your baby's diet. See the next column for fibre-containing foods
- Offer undiluted prune, pear or apple juice in a cup. Try 1-2 oz of juice to start, up to a maximum of 4 oz per day
- Offer sips of water in a sippy cup. Water should not replace your baby's intake of breastmilk or formula

Do not give your baby laxatives, enemas, suppositories, other medications or herbal supplements without talking to your doctor first.

Formula fed babies need iron fortified infant formula. Iron in infant formula is not constipating.

## Foods containing fibre

When babies start eating solid foods after six months, foods that contain fibre are important to help with regular, soft stools. Foods with fibre may also help with constipation. Fibre is found in grain products, vegetables, fruits and legumes (beans, peas and lentils). Below is a list of fibre containing foods. Keep the texture of food appropriate for your baby's age.

### Six months and older

- Infant cereals – oats, barley, wheat
- Prunes or applesauce
- Vegetables or fruit
- Beans, lentils or chickpeas



### Other ideas for 8-12 months

- Whole wheat toast, cut into strips
- Whole grain crackers
- Whole grain cereal – Shreddies™, Corn Bran™ or Bran Flakes™
- Brown rice
- Whole wheat pasta
- Small pieces of bran muffin



## Call your doctor if...

- Your baby is less than six months and is constipated; ask for an assessment
- There is blood in the stool
- Your baby is in a lot of pain during bowel movements
- You have tried the suggestions in this fact sheet and your baby's stools remain hard, dry and difficult to pass