

# Constipation (Baby)

## Definition

- Can't pass a stool or pain (crying) when passing a stool
- Can't pass a stool after straining or pushing longer than 10 minutes
- Passes stools infrequently
- Your child is less than 1 year old

## Health Information

### Normal Frequency of Stools

- Once children are on normal table foods, their stool pattern is like adults. The normal range is 3 per day to 1 every 2 days.
- Kids who go every 4 or 5 days almost always have pain with passage.
- Kids who go every 3 days often drift into longer times. Then, they also develop symptoms.
- Any child with pain during stool passage or lots of straining needs treatment. At the very least, the child should be treated with changes in diet.

### Normal Stools and Normal Behaviors

- **Breastfed and over 1 month old.** Stools every 4-7 days that are soft, large and pain-free can be normal. Occurs in 20% of breastfed babies. Caution: Before 1 month old, not stooling enough can mean not getting enough breast milk.
- **Straining in babies.** Grunting or straining while pushing out a stool is normal in young babies. It's hard to pass stool lying on the back with no help from gravity. Becoming red in the face during straining is also normal. Key: They continue to pass normal size stools every day. Just not every time they have straining.
- **Large stools.** Size relates to the amount of food eaten. Large eaters have larger stools.

### Causes

- True constipation is uncommon in babies.
- Sometimes, caused by formula only diet.

## Care Advice

### 1. Overview:

- True constipation is not common in infants.
- When it occurs, most often, it's from a change in diet.
- Passing a stool should be free of pain.
- Any child with pain during stool passage or infrequent stools needs treatment. At the very least, they need changes in their diet.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

## 2. **Diet for Infants Under 1 Year Old:**

- For babies over 1 month old, can add fruit juice (e.g., apple or pear juice). After 3 months, can use prune (plum) juice.
- Amount: 1 ounce (30 mL) per month of age each day. Limit amount to 4 ounces (120 mL) per day. Reason fruit juice is approved for these babies: treating a symptom.
- Age over 4 months old, also add baby foods with high fiber. Do this twice a day. Examples are peas, beans, apricots, prunes, peaches, pears, or plums.
- If on finger foods, add cereals and small pieces of fresh fruit.
- Fluids: Give enough fluids to stay well hydrated. Reason: This keeps the stool soft.

## 3. **Excercises to Help Stool Release:**

- Help your baby by holding the knees against the chest. This is like squatting for your baby. This is the natural position for pushing out a stool. It's hard to have a stool lying down.
- Relax the legs then press up again. Move them like riding a bike.
- Gently pump on the lower abdomen with your fingers. This may work even better.
- If no stool release within 5 minutes, stop. It will usually work next time your baby is straining.

## 4. **Warm Water to Relax the Anus:**

- Warmth can help relax the anus and release a stool.
- Apply a warm wet washcloth to your baby's bottom. Or help them sit in a basin of warm water. Caution: always stay with them.
- You can also put a warm wet cotton ball on the anus. Vibrate it side to side for about 10 seconds to help relax the anus.
- Caution: Don't put anything inside the anus to trigger pooping. Reason: It could become habit forming.

## 5. **What to Expect:**

- Most often, changes in diet helps constipation within a few days.

## **Call Your Doctor If**

- Constipation lasts more than 1 week after making changes to diet
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

### **Pediatric Care Advice**

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