

Straining and Grunting Baby - Normal

Definition

- Grunting, straining and pushing to pass a stool
- This is normal during the first 3 months
- Babies are learning how to get the poop out
- Doctors call this the grunting baby syndrome

Health Information

Symptoms

- When young babies are pushing, it's normal for them to make grunting sounds.
- They also become red in the face.
- They draw up their legs to tighten their tummy muscles.
- They are fussy but not in any pain. They usually don't cry.
- Straining even occurs with soft stools. Grunting may even be needed to pass gas.

Cause

- Some newborns have to learn how to relax their anus when their rectum is full.
- Reason: they spent 9 months in the womb with the anus tightly closed.
- They also have to build up their tummy muscles.
- This normal process takes longer in some babies than others.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- It's normal for many babies to go poop with little effort after a full feeding.
- Other normal babies pass stools only with lots of pushing.
- After 5 minutes or so, they usually pass a poop. If not, they most often pass one after the next feeding. Unlike constipation, they pass at least several stools per day.
- About 20% of newborns have the grunting baby syndrome.
- If straining happens several times without a stool, here is some care advice that should help.

2. Flexed Position 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 again. Move them like riding a bike.
- Or gently pump on the lower abdomen. This may work even better.
- If no stool release within 5 minutes, stop. It will usually work next time your baby is straining.

3. Warm Water to Relax the Anus:

- Warmth can relax the anus and help release a stool.
- Put a warm wet washcloth on your baby's bottom for a few minutes.
- Or put a warm wet cotton ball on the anus. Vibrate it side to side for about 10 seconds. That should relax the anus.
- Caution: Don't put anything inside the anus to trigger pooping. Reason: it could become habit forming.

4. **What to Expect:**

- This normal pushing and grunting can go on for 1 to 2 months.
- It ends when your baby's body learns how to relax the anus when the rectum is full.
- It's not common after 3 months of age.

Call Your Doctor If

- Your baby does not pass 3 or more stools per day
- The straining gets worse
- You think your baby needs to be seen

Pediatric Care Advice

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