

## Common Infant Problems

(Birth – 1 year)

# Constipation

## \* How do I know if my baby is constipated?

Your baby will have fewer bowel movements than usual. His stools may be hard, dry, and difficult to pass. Other signs include:

- Upset, swollen, or hard stomach.
- A fussy baby.
- A raw or bleeding rectum (area between buttocks).
- Fever, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, weight loss, or poor weight gain.



## What's normal?

During the first few days of life, babies have dark, sticky stools called meconium. These stools were in the baby before birth. The stools change color around days four to six. Although each baby is different, newborns have stool habits something like the following:

### Breastfed Newborns

Breastfed babies often stool after every feeding during the first month of life.

### Formula-fed Newborns

Week 1: four to five stools per day

Weeks 2 – 4: around two stools per day

At about one month, breastfed and formula-fed babies may have fewer stools each day or a stool every few days.

**In general, stools are considered normal if they:**

- Are not watery.
- Do not happen more than three times in one day, although some healthy babies may have more.
- Are not too dry and hard.
- Pass easily even after a few days with no bowel movements.

## \* What causes constipation?

- Not enough fluids (breastmilk or formula) or solid foods (if 6 months or older).
- Changing from breastmilk to infant formula or changing to a new infant formula.
- Adding solid foods to your baby's diet, including adding cereal to the bottle.
- Mixing infant formula with too much or too little water.

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## What causes constipation?

(Continued from other side)

- Feeding cereal or other solid foods to an infant under 4 months old.
- Water loss due to vomiting, fever, or hot weather.
- Lack of physical movement or activity by the infant.
- Side effects of certain medicines.

Infants with certain medical conditions such as Down syndrome and cerebral palsy are more likely to have constipation. Your doctor can recommend the best treatment for these conditions.



## When should I call the doctor or clinic?

### Call the doctor if:

- You have tried all of the above, and your baby is still constipated.
- Your newborn does not pass meconium in the first day or two of life.
- Your baby vomits, has blood in the stools, has a bloated tummy, refuses to feed, or has a fever over 99°F.

## What can I do to prevent constipation?

### Do:

- Breastfeed your baby.
- Mix infant formula and infant cereal according to directions.
- If your baby is under 6 months old, increase fluids such as breastmilk or formula.
- If he is constipated, offer 2 ounces of water twice a day and, if your doctor advises, 1 to 2 ounces of 100 percent prune, pear, or apple juice. (Juice is generally not recommended for infants less than 6 months old, except when treating constipation.)
- Wait to feed infant cereal until your baby can sit up with help, opens his mouth for a spoon, and can keep most of the cereal in his mouth — about 6 months old.
- If your baby is 6 months or older, feed more mashed fruits and vegetables and 2 to 3 ounces of 100 percent prune, pear, or apple juice.
- Increase activity by moving your baby's legs in a bicycle fashion and allow more play time on the floor.

### Do not:

- Give your baby honey. It could give your baby infant botulism, a type of food poisoning.
- Add cereal to your baby's bottle, unless your baby's clinic or doctor tells you to.
- Give your baby any medicine, laxatives, suppositories, or enemas to cause a bowel movement unless your baby's clinic or doctor tells you to.
- Insert objects, such as a thermometer, into your baby's rectum.

For more ideas on how to relieve constipation, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics [www.aap.org/topics.html](http://www.aap.org/topics.html) or the Mayo Clinic [www.mayoclinic.com/health/infant-constipation/AN01089](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/infant-constipation/AN01089).