



NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.

Helping Hand™

Health Education for Patients and Families

Constipation: Infant

Constipation (con-stah-PAY-shun) in infants can worry parents. Most of the time, your baby is not really constipated. They may not have developed a routine for pooping yet. Some babies do not develop a bowel movement (BM) pattern for a while.

An infant's BM pattern can change if their diet changes, like switching from breastmilk to formula, starting solid foods, or drinking less formula than usual. If your baby's stool (poop) is not soft or easily passed, then they may be constipated.

In rare cases, constipation may be caused by a lack of nerves going to the intestines or by a problem with the way the intestine formed at birth. Your baby can be tested for these conditions if your health care provider feels it is needed.

Signs of constipation

- less stools than their usual pattern
- straining more than normal to have a bowel movement
- a change in how the stool looks from soft and mushy to:
 - small, hard pebbles, or like a large, round golf ball
 - loose and watery
- abdomen (belly) bloated or swollen with gas
- painful cramps

Treatment

- If your baby is not eating baby food yet, you may give 1 to 2 ounces of 100% fruit juice (pear, prune, cherry, or apple) once a day. Stop the juice if their stools become too loose.
- If they are old enough to eat baby foods, feed them pureed pears, peaches, or prunes instead of giving them juice.

- If your baby eats cereal, it may help to give oatmeal, wheat, or barley cereal. Rice cereal can cause constipation in some children.
- Sometimes giving your baby a warm bath to relax them or exercising their legs, like riding a bicycle, will help stimulate the bowels to move (Picture 1).
- If it has been a few days since your baby has pooped and the juice or pureed food has not worked, then you can try a glycerin suppository. Place your baby on their back. Gently push the suppository into their anus (bottom). Suppositories are meant for occasional use.
- Contact your baby's health care provider before giving them laxatives, baby mineral oil, or enemas to treat constipation.



Picture 1 A warm bath can sometimes stimulate the bowels to move.

Medical therapy

Your child's health care provider has ordered the following treatments:

- ☐ Give your child the following medicine:

- ☐ Check your child's temperature using a digital, rectal thermometer. Put a small amount of petroleum jelly (Vaseline®) on its tip before inserting into the rectum. Taking a rectal temperature may stimulate the baby to pass stool.

When to call the health care provider

Call the health care provider if any of the following occurs:

- Your baby is irritable and seems to be having stomach pain. Infants will pull their legs up to their stomach and cry when they are in pain.
- Your baby has constipation and develops vomiting, and their belly looks like it is bloated or filled with gas.
- You see blood in their stool.
- Their constipation does not get better with treatment.

If you have any questions or concerns, call your baby's health care provider.