

# UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING CONSTIPATION IN BABIES

## *What You Need to Know*

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### **What is Constipation?**

Constipation is a condition where your baby will have a hard time passing poops, has poop that is hard, dry, or lumpy, and/or is going long periods of time between pooping.

### **What are signs your baby is constipated?**

- Poop looks hard, dry, or lumpy. Sometimes it might look like pebbles (picture 1), or sausage shaped but lumpy like a bunch of grapes (picture 2).
- Your baby may show signs of pain when trying to poop. This can look like your baby is arching their back while crying, grunting, and/or turning red in the face.
- Eating or feeding less than usual.
- Pooping less or going longer between poops than is normal for them.
- Your baby's stomach might look bloated, or larger than usual, and feel hard if you press softly on their stomach.
- The area around your baby's anus might be torn or cracked, which may bleed at times.



### **What is “normal” for most infants?**

It can take time for babies to develop a regular pooping routine. All babies have their own routines. Some babies poop more often or less frequently than other babies. Babies that are breastfed will poop more often than babies that are formula fed. It is important to be familiar with your baby's pooping routine. This will help figure out if you should be concerned.

### **What causes constipation?**

- Change from breastmilk to formula.
- Formula not prepared properly.
- Starting solid foods.
- Not drinking enough liquids (breastmilk and/or formula; water for babies 6 months and older).
- Possible intolerance to food or an ingredient in the formula.
- In extreme cases, a medical condition could cause constipation.

### **Treatment**

#### Babies younger than 6 months

- If your baby is formula fed, make sure powdered formula is prepared by adding the water in the bottle first and then adding the powder. Check the mixing instructions on the package label to double check you are adding the correct amount of powder to water.
- Encourage supervised tummy time for your baby. This will help put gentle pressure on their bowels to help them pass a bowel movement.
- Gently rub your baby's stomach in a clockwise direction while they are trying to pass a bowel movement.

- Place your baby in a warm bath or place a warm washcloth over your baby's stomach to help relieve discomfort.
- Bicycle your baby's legs by placing them on their back and move their legs in a cycling motion.

Babies 6 months or older (and health care provider has okayed baby foods)

- Offer an additional 2-4 oz. of water throughout the day. Aim for 4-8 oz. of water a day.
- Offer 2 oz. of 100% fruit juice like pear, apple, or prune. Dilute with water (2 oz. of juice mixed with 2 oz. of water)
- Offer 2-4 tablespoons of pear, apple, or prune puree.
- If you are offering your baby rice cereal, replace it with infant oatmeal, wheat, or multigrain cereal.

### **When to call a health care provider.**

- Constipation does not get better with treatment.
- You see blood in your baby's stool.
- Your baby starts vomiting.
- Your baby is showing signs of severe pain.

\*Contact your baby's health care provider before giving them laxatives, karo syrup, baby mineral oil, gripe water, or enemas to treat constipation.

Do not hesitate to reach out to your baby's pediatrician or health care provider for additional guidance and support.

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