



Infant constipation

Infant constipation is the passage of hard, dry bowel movements—not necessarily the absence of daily bowel movements. Infant constipation often begins when a baby transitions from breast milk to formula or begins eating solid foods. Breastfed infants can stool once every 5 days. As long as your baby’s stool is soft and he or she is passing gas and eating normally, it is NOT constipation.

If your newborn seems to be constipated it isn’t a good idea to treat infant constipation with corn (Karo) syrup. Although dark corn syrup was once a common home remedy for infant constipation, today’s commercially prepared dark corn syrup may not contain the type of chemical structure that draws fluid into the intestine and softens stool—making it ineffective for infant constipation. In addition, for children younger than age 1, Karo syrup may be a potential cause of a rare but serious form of food poisoning known as infant botulism.

If your older baby seems to be constipated, try simple dietary changes:

- **Water.** Offer your baby a daily serving of water in addition to usual feedings. Start with 2 to 4 ounces (about 60 to 120 milliliters). Try more or less as you gauge your baby’s response to the water. Remember, though, the water doesn’t replace normal feedings with breast milk or formula.
- **Fruit Juice.** If water doesn’t seem to help, offer your baby a daily serving of apple, prune or pear juice in addition to usual feedings. Start with 2 to 4 ounces (about 60 to 120 milliliters), and experiment to determine whether your baby needs more or less.
- **Baby food.** If your baby is eating solid foods, try pureed pears or prunes. Offer barley cereal instead of rice cereal.

To ease the passage of hard stools, consider applying a small amount of water-based lubricant to your baby's anus. Don't use mineral oil, laxatives or enemas to treat infant constipation.

If your baby is struggling and it's been a few days since his or her last bowel movement, it might help to place an infant glycerin suppository into your baby's anus. Glycerin suppositories are available without prescription. They're only meant for occasional use, however, if dietary changes aren't effective.

Rarely, infant constipation is caused by an underlying condition, such as Hirschsprung's disease, hypothyroidism or cystic fibrosis. If infant constipation persists despite dietary changes or is accompanied by other signs or symptoms—such as vomiting or irritability—contact us.