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Patient Education:

Constipation, Infant

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Constipation, Infant

Constipation in infants is a problem when bowel movements are hard, dry, and difficult to pass. It is important to remember that while most infants pass stools daily, some do so only once every 2–3 days. If stools are less frequent but appear soft and easy to pass, then the infant is not constipated.

CAUSES

- Lack of fluid. This is the most common cause of constipation in babies not yet eating solid foods.
- Lack of bulk (*fiber*).
- Switching from breast milk to formula or from formula to cow's milk. Constipation that is caused by this is usually brief.
- Medicine (uncommon).
- A problem with the intestine or anus. This is more likely with constipation that starts at or right after birth.

SYMPTOMS

- Hard, pebble-like stools.
- Large stools.
- Infrequent bowel movements.
- Pain or discomfort with bowel movements.
- Excess straining with bowel movements (more than the grunting and getting red in the face that is normal for many babies).

DIAGNOSIS

Your health care provider will take a medical history and perform a physical exam.

TREATMENT

Treatment may include:

- Changing your baby's diet.
- Changing the amount of fluids you give your baby.
- Medicines. These may be given to soften stool or to stimulate the bowels.
- A treatment to clean out stools (uncommon).

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- If your infant is over 4 months of age and not on solids, offer 2–4 oz (60–120 mL) of water or diluted 100% fruit juice daily. Juices that are helpful in treating constipation include prune, apple, or pear juice.
- If your infant is over 6 months of age, in addition to offering water and fruit juice daily, increase the amount of fiber in the diet by adding:

- High-fiber cereals like oatmeal or barley.
- Vegetables like sweet potatoes, broccoli, or spinach.
- Fruits like apricots, plums, or prunes.
- When your infant is straining to pass a bowel movement:
 - Gently massage your baby's tummy.
 - Give your baby a warm bath.
 - Lay your baby on his or her back. Gently move your baby's legs as if he or she were riding a bicycle.
- Be sure to mix your baby's formula according to the directions on the container.
- Do not give your infant honey, mineral oil, or syrups.
- Only give your child medicines, including laxatives or suppositories, as directed by your child's health care provider.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your baby is still constipated after 3 days of treatment.
- Your baby has a loss of appetite.
- Your baby cries with bowel movements.
- Your baby has bleeding from the anus with passage of stools.
- Your baby passes stools that are thin, like a pencil.
- Your baby loses weight.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your baby who is younger than 3 months has a fever.
- Your baby who is older than 3 months has a fever and persistent symptoms.
- Your baby who is older than 3 months has a fever and symptoms suddenly get worse.
- Your baby has bloody stools.
- Your baby has yellow-colored vomit.
- Your baby has abdominal expansion.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your baby's condition.
- Will get help right away if your baby is not doing well or gets worse.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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