

Newborn Constipation: Here's how to help them

TODDLER

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Parents should observe their children's bowel movement routine and behaviour to see if they are constipated. Hydration, high-fibre foods, being active, and the right milk also help ease baby constipation.

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It's not the most fun part of being a parent; it ranks about level with cleaning up their vomit. Keeping track of your child's bowel movements, however, is certainly an important thing for parents to do.

Parents should pay attention to how often their child is pooping, as well as what the poop looks like. And there might come a time when your child isn't filling their nappy, which is when parents should ask themselves, 'is my child constipated?'.

Signs of constipation

Your child could be constipated if they go more than a few days without having a bowel movement. And if they do eventually do so after a few days and their stool is hard, they could be constipated too.

Have you ever witnessed your child straining while doing a bowel movement? This could mean they're constipated. While some straining is normal when toddlers do a poo, some may also cry while doing so, as well as feel some pain and discomfort.

Streaks of blood in their poop are a sure sign that your child has been pushing too hard when having a bowel movement. Straining to do so can cause tiny tears around your child's anus, leading to bleeding.

Tummy ache could also be a sign of baby constipation, especially if the pain comes and goes and your child's belly is hard. Children who are cranky could also be constipated. Plus, they'll display holding-on behaviour such as fidgeting, crossing

their legs or squatting. And, if they're toilet trained, they'll refuse to sit on the toilet.

A constipated child also will say no to food as they'll feel full quickly and their tummy will make them feel uncomfortable. So pay attention if your child is less hungry than usual.

How to relieve constipation

Give them high-fibre foods. Baby constipation is often caused by the lack of fibre in a child's diet. A simple way to deal with this is to give your child more fibre-rich solid food. Examples include cooked grains such as barley or oats, whole-grain breads or crackers, and fruits and vegetables such as broccoli, pears and prunes. If your child isn't on solids yet, you can feed them these foods in pureed form.

Keep them hydrated. We need to be properly hydrated for regular bowel movements so ensure that your child drinks a sufficient amount of milk and water. If your child is over six months old and suffers from baby constipation, try giving them a bit of prune juice (dilute it with water if the taste is too strong for them), which may help their bowel movements.

Get moving. Exercise speeds up the digestive process, so make sure that your child is active. If they're too young to exercise, help them to do so by doing fun activities like leg bicycles - make your baby lie on their back and pedal their legs in the air as if they're riding a bike. You could also gently massage their stomach, to stimulate the bowels to pass through smoothly.

Choose the right formula milk. It could be as simple as ensuring the formula is mixed up correctly, with enough water, or it could be a more serious decision that involves picking formula with more beneficial ingredients for your child's digestion.

Oligofructose, an ingredient in formula milk, is a soluble dietary fibre that stimulates the presence of beneficial bacteria in the intestinal tract. Children fed with formula milk holding a higher dose of oligofructose were found to have softer stools and less baby constipation, compared with those fed a formula without oligofructose or a lower relative dose.¹

Set a regular toilet routine. If your child is toilet trained, they should get used to having a bowel movement as part of their daily routine. You can encourage them to do so by getting them to sit on the toilet at the same time each day or using a reward system when they do so successfully.

Reference:

1. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4370932/>

