

Constipation in Infants and Children

Bowel habits are different for every child. Some children go twice a day; others go only once every four days. Both are perfectly normal.

Infrequent bowel movements alone are not a sign of constipation; it may just be your child's normal pattern. 1
If your child has painful bowel movements that are hard, dry, pebble-like and difficult to pass, your child may be constipated. 1

Ages 0-6 months: At this age, infants may be constipated if they don't get enough fluids or feedings. Giving solid foods before 6 months of age will not help constipation.

What you can do to help:

- Breastfeed on demand. If you have questions about the amount of milk your baby is getting, call the Huron County Health Unit and speak to a public health nurse.
- If using formula, be sure that you are mixing exactly by following the directions.
- Formula-fed babies can be offered 1-2 oz. sterilized water (boil for 2 minutes and cool) occasionally between feedings.

Ages 6-12 months: Babies at this age may become constipated because they don't get enough fluid or fibre.

What you can do to help:

- Offer your baby 28 ml to 56 ml (1-2 oz.) of water occasionally between feedings.
- Offer undiluted, 100% fruit juices like warm prune, apple and pear in the baby's diet - they help get the system moving! Give juice from a cup, not a bottle. It may take some practice but they will get the hang of it very quickly.
- Offer more fibre-rich foods. A varied intake (for older babies) of fibre-containing foods such as whole grain breads and cereals, fruits (pureed pears, prunes), vegetables and cooked legumes. Oatmeal is the baby cereal that is highest in fibre. Rice cereal may be constipating for some babies.
- Try gently moving your baby's legs in a bicycle motion. Exercise helps loosen stools.



Remember:

Do not give your baby or child laxatives, enemas, suppositories, or any medications without talking to your health care provider first. These may make constipation worse in the long term.

Call your health care provider when:

- You have tried the previous suggestions and your child is still constipated.
- Your child has not had a bowel movement for five days or more.
- You find blood in the stool.
- Your child is in a lot of pain during bowel movements.