

Infants Straining to Move Bowels (Infant Dyschezia)

Why do some infants strain or seem to have a hard time passing poop?

A baby's body needs to learn how to poop. This happens as the stomach muscles get stronger and the nervous system develops. After crying for 20 or 30 minutes with straining, the baby may turn red, grunt or scream, and then have a soft poop. This is called infant dyschezia. The stools are soft and there is no blood. This can happen many times each day.

Many parents think it is constipation, but it is not. With constipation, the stools will be hard.



What causes it?

In order to poop, the stomach muscles must tighten and the butt muscles have to relax. Some baby's cannot do this without help. It takes time, but these two things must happen at the same time in order to have a bowel movement.

The crying means your baby is trying to create pressure to push out the poop.

How is it diagnosed?



Your health care provider will do an exam to make sure your baby is healthy. You will be asked about how your baby is sleeping, eating and developing. You will also be asked if your baby strains and cries for more than 10 minutes before passing a soft stool.

How is it treated?

The best thing to do is wait. It can take a few weeks to a few months. It will go away on its own. Suppositories or stimulation with a rectal thermometer have not been shown to help. Gentle tummy massage and holding your baby in frog leg position (squat) may help.

It may be hard for you to see and hear, but your baby is not in pain. Your baby is learning how to use their new body and learning how to coordinate their muscles. The grunts and cries are due to your baby's attempt to push out the poop. It will stop once your baby learns how to push.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any concerns or if your child has special health care needs not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.