

Dyschezia in babies

Information for parents and carers



Infant dyschezia is a common problem seen in up to 10% of babies under 1 year, usually between 1 and 9 months of age.

Dyschezia is a medical term for apparent discomfort around the time that a baby has a poo.

It can often be mistaken for constipation, as the baby will cry, strain, and go red in the face for several minutes (up to half an hour) before passing a stool. However, it is different to constipation because the stool is soft (not hard) and the baby usually opens their bowels every day or every other day.

Why does it happen?

Dyschezia happens because the baby is still developing their muscles in their abdominal wall (tummy) and their pelvic floor (bottom). These need to work together to allow the baby to pass stool comfortably. It is a process - just like learning to roll, walk and talk. For this reason it can take several weeks or months to fully resolve.

What NOT to do

If the stools are soft, there is no point in using laxatives or other medications for this condition – they won't help the muscle coordination develop any faster. It's also not helpful (and can be very harmful) to use cotton buds, suppositories, or other instruments in the baby's bottom to relieve the stools.

What you CAN do

Some parents find that gently cycling their baby's legs up to their belly can help (this probably helps relax the pelvic floor). Otherwise, your baby will benefit from any soothing comfort while they are crying – cuddles, talking/singing, a warm bath, carrying around, or sucking on a dummy if they have one. It might help to know that there is a theory that the crying is helpful to the baby because it increases the pressure in their abdomen which helps pass the stool – and is not necessarily a sign of pain or distress.

When to see your Health Visitor or GP

- If the stools are hard or infrequent (less than 2-3 per week)
- If the abdomen is very large (distended)
- If there is lots of vomiting, or any green vomiting.

More information

IFFGD website - Infant Dyschezia:

<https://aboutkidsgi.org/lower-gi/childhood-defecation-disorders/infant-dyschezia/>



1. Zeevenhooven J, Koppen I, Benniga M. The New Rome IV Criteria for functional Gastrointestinal Disorders in Infants and Toddlers, *Pediatr Gastroenterol Hepatol Nutr*. 2017; March 20(1):1-13.
2. Kramer E, den Hertog-Kuijl JH, van den Broek LM, van Leengoed E, Bulk AM, Kneepkens CM, Benninga MA. Defecation patterns in infants, a prospective cohort study, *Archdischild*. 2015; 100:533–536.
3. Vandenplas Y, Abkari A, Bellaiche M, Benninga M, Chouragui JP, Cokura F et al. Prevalence and Health Outcomes of Functional Gastrointestinal Symptoms in Infants From Birth to 12 Months of Age. *J Pediatr Gastroenterol Nutr* 2015; 61:531–537.

