

Stools & Straining

During the first few days of an infant's life, he/she has dark thick tarry stools known as meconium. These subsequently change to "normal" infant stools in which the color, consistency, and frequency vary on a daily basis. The colors of normal infant stool can vary between yellow, green, orange, and brown. Unlike what most people are led to believe, green stools do not necessarily mean diarrhea. Normal consistency of stool can vary among the following: 1) loose runny cottage cheese; 2) seedy like mustard; 3) pasty like glue; 4) mushy like pudding; or 5) pasty like clay. Diarrhea would have the consistency of pure water gushing out the diaper, down the infant's leg and into the bassinet. Constipation would appear as small pebble-like stools that are very firm. Constipation has nothing to do with the frequency of stools. Stool frequency may also vary daily in the normal infant. An infant may have as many as ten bowel movements per day or as few as one or two stools per week. As long as the color and consistency of these stools are normal there is no need for concern. Enemas, suppositories, or laxatives should not be administered before consulting with your pediatrician.

As long as your baby seems happy and content, is eating normally, and has no signs of illness, don't worry about minor changes in the stools. If he/she strains, grunts, or turns red in the face while having a bowel movement, that's normal too. Nursing mothers become particularly concerned when the frequency of infant stools decrease. They view this either as a sign of constipation or lack of milk production. In fact, infants who are exclusively nursed rarely get constipated until either formula or solid foods are introduced. Once mom's milk supply is intact (usually between 3 - 5 days of life) an infant will have somewhere between 4 to 8 wet diapers per day and begin to gain weight by the end of the first week of life. Both urine output and weight gain are much better indicators of adequate milk supply in a breast fed infant than is their often erratic stool frequency.