Infant Stools: What's Normal – Topic of the Month

UPDATED APRIL 2025

Providing parents information on infant stooling characteristics may help to alleviate some more common concerns. There may be times when parents are unsure whether their breastfed or formula fed infant is stooling normally. This memo provides some guidance on infant stools.

Normal stools

There are a variety of colors and consistencies that are considered normal for infant stools. In the first few days of baby's life, stools are dark brown or black and sticky; this is called meconium. The stools will gradually change into a dark green before becoming yellow and seedy looking. Finally, as baby ages and begins solids, the type of food eaten will determine the regular color and consistency of stools.

Typically, infants stool one to three times per day early on, but less often as they get older. Breastfeeding infant stool will often be looser and have a softer consistency than those fed formula. The color and consistency of stool can vary for each infant, often from day to day.

A stool that is whitish or red is a red flag; these colors may indicate a medical condition and should be referred to a pediatrician.

Identifying concerns

Changes in the infant stool may be the first sign of concern in dietary or health patterns; it is important to know what to look for. Asking parents some identifying questions can help us know what the next steps should be.

Questions to ask families

- Tell me a little about how feeding going?
- Is the baby breast or formula feeding or both?
  - There are differences in stool amounts and consistency depending on how infant is fed.
- How often is baby feeding?
  - Overfeeding can lead to gassiness, diarrhea, and high weight gain.
  - Underfeeding can lead to dehydration, constipation, and low weight gain.
- If formula fed, how is the formula being made?
  - There are many risks with improper dilution of infant formula.

- What else is baby taking in beside the breastmilk or formula?

- What medical conditions might you be are aware of?

  - A medical condition or allergy can cause changes in stool.

Formula vs breast

The key is to identify when something is not normal and go from there. Let's look at a comparison between stools of breast and formula fed infants.
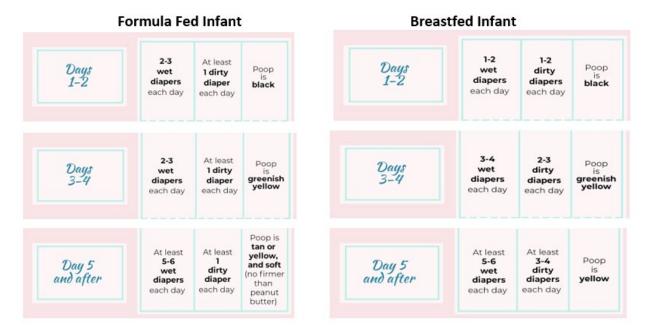

Formula Fed Infant

Days 1-2	2-3 wet diapers each day	At least 1 dirty diaper each day	Poop is black
Days 3-4	2-3 wet diapers each day	At least 1 dirty diaper each day	Poop is greenish yellow
Day 5 and after	At least 5-6 wet diapers each day	At least 1 dirty diaper each day	Poop is tan or yellow, and soft (no firmer than peanut butter)

Breastfed Infant

Days 1-2	1-2 wet diapers each day	1-2 dirty diapers each day	Poop is black
Days 3-4	3-4 wet diapers each day	2-3 dirty diapers each day	Poop is greenish yellow
Day 5 and after	At least 5-6 wet diapers each day	At least 3-4 dirty diapers each day	Poop is yellow

Image source: Wichealth.org

Common concerns

Two of the most common concerns participants have regarding stools are constipation and diarrhea. Below are some questions to consider when assessing parent's concerns.

Questions to ask when constipation is a concern

- Is baby excessively fussy?

- Is baby spitting up more than usual?

- Is baby having fewer stools than normal?

- Are stools unusually hard or contain blood?

- Does baby strain for more than 10 minutes without stool success?

- Are the stools hard and dry?

Questions to ask when diarrhea is a concern

- Is baby younger than 3 months?

- Is there a rectal temp of 100.4 F (or above)?

- Is baby vomiting?

- Does baby lack energy, acts irritable, or refuses to feed?

- Are there signs of dehydration, dry mouth or dry diapers?

- Are the stools watery or mucus filled?

> If the answers to *any of these* questions are '*yes*' and you have explored dietary changes with the participant, refer the family to the infant's health care provider for follow up.

WIC's role

The MOM policy Section 5.3: Nutrition Risk Assessment explains the importance for WIC staff to obtain and synthesize information about a participant to most appropriately individualize WIC services. This includes asking questions that allow for personalized education based on the participant's concerns and offering referrals when necessary. The infant nutrition assessment tools can be used to most accurately determine if there are concerns with health and feeding.

Infant assessment tools

- Brief questions and probes: Infant and Postpartum (PDF)

- Complete question format: Infant (PDF)

- Mid certification assessment questions: Infant (PDF)

- Training tools for nutrition assessment: Training Tool for Infant Assessment Questions (PDF)

Participants-centered services (PCS)

Using PCS Counseling Skills during the Nutrition Assessment includes using open-ended questions, this allows participants to share what infant feeding looks like to them in their own words. You may need to include the use of the probing questions to get to the most accurate picture of feeding behaviors. Starting a question with "*How do you…*" or "*What have you…*" is a great way to probe for additional information.

Example Questions:

- "How do you feel feeding is going?"

- "What has your doctor told you about infant stools?"

- "What have you tried to resolve the constipation?"

Baby behaviors

The Baby Behavior Brochure (Getting to Know Your Baby - English brochure (PDF)) can support parents learning infant communication by recognize their cues. It is through cues that the infant is telling their parents what they need.

The Baby Behavior clips (MN WIC Baby Behavior Education (YouTube) can help caregivers learn to recognize and understand their baby's cues and strengthen their bond with new baby. These clips are available through the **Minnesota WIC App** and through MDH YouTube online. Additionally, behavior clips can be found on WIChealth.org through the lesson titled "*Understanding Your Newborn: Sleep, Crying, and Cues***".

Learn more about Baby Behavior and the tools available for staff learning.

Staff resources

Pooping By the Numbers: What's Normal for Infants? (Healthychildren.org, July 11,2024)

Infant Nutrition and Feeding Guide (WIC Works Resource System, April 2019)

The scoop on poop. (Baby Goo Roo, Feb. 12, 2021)

Breastfeeding: 3 Tips for a Well-Fed Baby. (Wichealth.org.)

Formula Feeding: 3 Tips for a Well-Fed Baby (Wichealth.org.); includes link to Paced Bottle Feeding video.

References- complete listing of hyperlinks:

Section 5.3: Nutrition Risk Assessment
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch5/sctn5_3.pdf)

Infant and Postpartum
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/assessment/briefinfpp.pdf)

Infant
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/assessment/completeinfant.pdf)

Infant
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/assessment/mcainfant.pdf)

Training Tool for Infant Assessment Questions
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/assessment/infant.pdf)

PCS Counseling Skills
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/skills/counseling.html)

Getting to Know Your Baby - English brochure
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/babybehaviors/english.pdf)

MN WIC Baby Behavior Education
(https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnv1INVkmxmtYaMmowS5oBHnbgmps7Ai1)

WIChealth.org (https://www.wichealth.org/)

Pooping By the Numbers: What's Normal for Infants?
(https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Pooping-By-the-Numbers.aspx?_gl=1*1fbc9f8*_ga*MjIyNTE1Nzc4LjE3NDA0MzExMzI.*_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ*MTc0MzYzMjYwNi44LjAuMTc0MzYzMjYwNi4wLjAuMA..)

Infant Nutrition and Feeding Guide (https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/resources/infant-nutrition-and-feeding-guide)

The scoop on poop (https://babygooroo.com/articles/the-scoop-on-poop)

Breastfeeding: 3 Tips for a Well-Fed Baby
(https://www.wichealth.org/Member/Resource/index/5010)

Formula Feeding: 3 Tips for a Well-Fed Baby
(https://www.wichealth.org/Member/Resource?id=5011)

Paced Bottle Feeding video
(https://www.wichealth.org/Member/Resource/ResourceFlow?currentResourceId=5011&id=5042)