

Baby's Bowel Movements (2)

QUESTION: My 8-week old baby has gone for 8 days without passing motion. He used to have very frequent bowel movements before - as many as 5 to 7 a day. Is there something wrong with his system now? He is fully breastfed.

ANSWER: If your baby is otherwise well - sleeping and suckling well - then I would think there is little to worry about. Older breastfed babies - those over 6 weeks - often start spacing out their bowel motions. Some may do it only once in an interval of days and are perfectly normal. One reason is that, as the baby grows older, his digestive system also matures, and he is able to absorb much more efficiently. Breastmilk being so suited to the baby's intake, he may have absorbed it so completely that it takes several days to have enough waste to send out. This is part of the economy of mother's milk.

I once had the opportunity to ask an Australian pediatrician what was the longest period he had seen a breastfed baby go without having a bowel motion, and yet was perfectly fine. They see a lot more breastfed babies in Australia. His answer was an astounding 21 days!

Your baby had many bowel movements when he was younger, and that was perfectly normal too. A newborn may have 2 motions a day, gradually increasing in number as your milk supply increases. 2 to 5 motions in 24 hours may be the norm for many exclusively breastfed babies. This pattern may continue for many months.

Look for the Quantity. A baby with fewer motions may make up for it in the quantity discharged each time. If a very young baby has fewer than 2 motions in 24 hours, you may want to check whether he has enough milk intake. Count the number of wet (cloth) nappies in 24 hours. If he produces between 6 to 8 wet nappies in 24 hours, and has only received breastmilk, he is probably drinking enough.

If the nappy count is low, check the baby's suckling technique. He could be underfeeding because he is not suckling efficiently. Another possibility to consider is whether the baby is receiving the calorie-rich hind milk, or drinking only the watery foremilk. If the baby is switched to the second breast too soon, he missed the richer/creamier hind milk. Check your feeding pattern, and let baby nurse longer on the first breast and "empty" it before changing him to the second.

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