

# Grunting Baby Syndrome

By Robert S. Gillespie, MD, MPH

## What is grunting baby syndrome?

In the grunting baby syndrome, the baby appears to have trouble stooling (pooping). It looks like the baby is working very hard and is uncomfortable. The stools are soft and appear normal. The baby has stool one or more times a day. This happens most often in babies between 1 and 10 weeks old.

You may notice these things about your baby:

- A red or purple face while stooling
- Straining for several minutes
- Loud crying
- The baby may cry for 5-10 minutes before stooling
- After stooling, the baby appears comfortable

## What causes it?

In order to stool, children must do two things **at the same time**:

1. Increase the pressure in the abdomen (upper belly)
2. Relax the muscles in the pelvis (lower belly)

Grunting babies learn how to increase the pressure in the abdomen (#1) by crying. But they have not yet learned how to relax the muscles in the pelvis (#2) at the same time.

## What is the treatment?

- **No treatment is needed.** Children gradually learn how to coordinate these two activities.
- Each child is different, but almost all kids will master this in the first few months of life.
- No tests are required.
- Do not use enemas or suppositories.
- These can frighten the child and discourage him or her from stooling.
- They also interfere with the normal stooling process.

Babies are learning many things as they grow. One thing they have to learn is how to stool. This takes time. But almost all babies learn it in a few months.

## When should I call my doctor?

Call if:

- The stools are hard, not soft.
- Your baby's belly is swollen or tender to touch.
- You have questions or concerns.



Copyright 2007 by Robert S. Gillespie. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 2.5 License. To view a copy of this license, visit [KidneyWeb.net/license.htm](http://KidneyWeb.net/license.htm).