



Pediatric Clinic
PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS

Spitting Up in Babies

What happens when my baby spits up?

The medical term for "spitting up" is gastroesophageal reflux, or reflux. It happens when milk or solid food in the stomach comes back up into the esophagus. The esophagus is a tube that joins the mouth and the stomach.

When the baby's milk or food is in the esophagus, 3 things can happen:

1. The milk or food can be spit out of the mouth.
2. The milk or food can be sucked into the lungs.
3. The milk or food can go into the stomach for a while, but then it can go back up into the esophagus. It stays in the esophagus for a while before going back into the stomach.

Will reflux cause problems for my baby?

The good news is that usually reflux causes no serious problems. Spitting up is messy, but you probably don't need to worry about it.

When problems do happen, they are related to the 3 things that can happen to milk or food when it goes back up into the esophagus. Some of these problems are listed here:

1. Spitting up milk or food: growth problems, gagging
2. Breathing milk or food into the lungs: lung infections, asthma, coughing
3. Milk or food coming up into the esophagus for a while, then going back down into the stomach: crying from pain, not wanting to eat, vomiting blood

What can be done for reflux?

First, your doctor will make sure your baby is growing well. Your doctor will also see if your baby has breathing problems. If your doctor thinks your baby is OK, nothing else has to be done. Your doctor will want to see your baby regularly.

Some babies spit up less if their formula is thickened with rice cereal. This must not be done unless your baby is old enough to eat cereal, anyway (i.e. 4 months old or older). Ask your doctor if you can add a small amount of rice cereal to each ounce of formula. You might have to enlarge the nipple hole a little so the thicker formula will come out easily.

Some babies spit up less if they are given less milk at each feeding, but are fed more often.

Your doctor might show you different positions to put your baby in after a feeding. These positions might help your baby not spit up.

If your baby's reflux is bad, your doctor may prescribe medicine to help stop it. This medicine is the same medicine that is used for heartburn in adults. If your baby doesn't gain enough weight or has other problems, your doctor might do some tests.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- Your child is having difficulty breathing.
- Your child starts to act very sick.

Call during office hours if:

- Your child develops any complications such as an earache, sinus pain or pressure, or a fever lasting over 3 days.
- You have other questions or concerns.