Functional Constipation

This sheet is about having functional constipation in pregnancy or while breastfeeding. This information is based on research studies. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is functional constipation?

Constipation (difficulty in emptying the bowels) is the most common complaint of the digestive system. There are different types of constipation. Functional constipation is a type of chronic constipation that needs to be diagnosed by a healthcare provider following a set of diagnostic criteria. If you are taking medication for functional constipation, contact MotherToBaby to discuss your specific medications.

I have functional constipation. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

It is not known if functional constipation can make it harder to get pregnant.

Does having functional constipation increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. Studies have not been done to see if functional constipation can increase the chance of miscarriage.

Does having functional constipation increase the chance of birth defects?

Birth defects can happen in any pregnancy for different reasons. Out of all babies born each year, about 3 out of 100 (3%) will have a birth defect. We look at research studies to try to understand if an exposure, like functional constipation, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. Studies have not been done to see if functional constipation can increase the chance of birth defects.

Would having functional constipation increase the chance of other pregnancy related problems?

This has not been well studied. One study reported a higher chance for C-section among 221 people with functional constipation. Other factors, such as BMI, age, and less active lifestyles, could have also led to a higher chance for C-section among the people in this study.

Does having functional constipation in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

Studies have not been done to see if functional constipation can increase the chance of behavior or learning issues for the child.

Breastfeeding while I have functional constipation:

Functional constipation is unlikely to interfere with breastfeeding. Contact MotherToBaby to discuss any specific medications that you might be taking. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

If a man has functional constipation, can it affect his fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?

Studies have not been done to see if functional constipation could affect a man's fertility (ability to get a woman pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase the risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

MotherToBaby is currently conducting a study looking at functional constipation in pregnancy. If you are interested in taking part in this study, please call 1-877-311-8972 or sign up at https://mothertobaby.org/join-study/.

Please click here to view references.

Disclaimer: MotherToBaby Fact Sheets are meant for general information purposes and should not replace the advice of your health care provider. MotherToBaby is a service of the non-profit Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS). Copyright by OTIS, April 1, 2025.