

Intussusception

What is intussusception?

Intussusception is a serious problem of the intestine, or bowel. When intussusception occurs, part of the intestine collapses into itself. It folds into itself like a collapsible tube—like part of an antenna folding up—with one part slipping inside another part. This makes the intestines not work properly.

Who gets it?

Intussusception occurs most commonly in babies between five and nine months of age. Boy babies are affected twice as often as girl babies. Sometimes newborn babies, older children and adults have intussusception, but it's not common in these age groups.

What causes it?

There is no known cause for most cases of intussusception. Rarely, intussusception is caused by conditions such as appendicitis or tumors.

How will the doctor know if my baby has it?

Usually, babies with intussusception vomit and have stomach pain and bloody stools. Sometimes a baby who has intussusception also has a fever. However, these things may not always happen. Sometimes the only clue that something is wrong is that the baby is irritable or doesn't move around very much.

If your doctor thinks that your baby has intussusception, a special x-ray called a barium enema will be taken. A substance called barium is put in the baby's rectum, and several x-rays are taken. The x-rays will show the doctor whether something is wrong with your baby's intestine.

How is it treated?

In many cases, the intussusception is corrected by the barium enema alone. Antibiotics are usually not needed. Sometimes surgery is necessary to correct intussusception if the intestine doesn't stop collapsing into itself.

Will my baby be all right?

Most babies recover completely from intussusception, whether or not they have surgery. Occasionally, complications such as infection can occur if the intussusception is not treated quickly. If this happens, part of the bowel must be surgically removed.



This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

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