

VARIATION OF NORMAL: MECONIUM

What is it?

- Baby's first bowel-movement
- In 10% of all births, babies release some of the contents of their bowel before they are born
- Presence of meconium before birth is thought to indicate a distressed baby
- Meconium can be light or thin (yellowish and watery) or thick (dark, blackish green and more like diarrhea).
- Lighter meconium is thought to be an indication of older stress, i.e., stress that occurred some time ago.
- Thick meconium is thought to indicate newer, more recent stress.

What's the risk?

- Can present a danger to babies who aspirate meconium; babies can develop a chemical pneumonitis called meconium aspiration

How is it treated/handled?

- Most OBs suction the baby "on the perineum", when the baby's head is born, but the body is not.
- Recent studies indicate no difference in outcomes between babies that are suctioned and those that are not.
- Some midwives suction on the perineum, so do not.
- Many hospitals require visual examinations of the baby's airway and vocal cords for evidence of meconium in lower airways.
- Most babies who are delivered with meconium have no complications.

What can I do to avoid/prepare?

- Babies, and their mothers, are less likely to become stressed in labors that are relaxed and progressing on their own schedule.
- Be aware that some OBs will want to rupture your membranes to see if the water is clear. Is this ok with you?