

Intestinal Atresia and Stenosis

What is it?

Intestinal atresia (pronounced in-test-in-uhl ah-tre-zhah) is a birth defect of the intestines. The **intestines** are a tube that connects the stomach, moves food, and ends at the anus. **Atresia** is complete blockage of the intestines, whereas **stenosis** is partial blockage. The blockage most often occurs in part of the **small intestine**, which is divided into three sections: the **duodenum**, **jejunum**, and **ileum**. Some babies have atresia of the **large intestine**, also called the **colon**. Intestinal atresia may be given a more specific name for what part of the small intestine is blocked. For example, blockage in the duodenum would be called “**duodenal atresia**”.

Babies with intestinal atresia often develop an enlarged belly, have constipation, and may vomit after feeding. Some babies with intestinal atresia are premature. About 50% of babies with duodenal atresia have additional birth defects, including heart defects or defects of the genitals, bladder, and kidneys. About 30% – 40% of babies with duodenal atresia have **Down syndrome**.

How common is it?

About 1 out of every 1,500 babies is born with intestinal atresia or stenosis each year.

What causes it?

The cause is often not known. Research has shown it may be due to a decrease in the blood supply to the intestines of the baby during pregnancy. The reason for the decreased blood supply is unknown. More research is needed to understand the exact cause of intestinal atresia and stenosis.

How is it diagnosed?

It can be diagnosed during pregnancy or after birth. During pregnancy screening tests can check for birth defects and other conditions. Multiple tests, including x-rays and ultrasounds, may be done after birth to confirm the diagnosis.

How is it treated?

Intestinal atresia can be surgically corrected. The affected portion of the intestine will be removed, and the remaining ends of the intestines will be reconnected. Your child’s doctor will discuss treatment options with you.



For more information:

Cincinnati Children’s Hospital

<https://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/health/i/obstructions>

Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia

<http://www.chop.edu/conditions-diseases/small-bowel-atresia>