



PARENTING EDUCATION

Infant Colic

Adapted by Ann Marie Read, RN, BSN from: *The British United Provident Association (BUPA)*. Retrieved from: hcd2.bupa.co.uk/fact_sheets/mosby_factsheets/infant_colic.html

What is infant colic?

Colic is a broad term which refers to episodes of uncontrollable, extended crying in a baby who is otherwise healthy and well fed. Every baby cries, but if your baby cries or fusses for more than three hours a day, three to four days a week, then he or she may have colic.

What causes infant colic and who is at risk?

The cause of colic isn't known, although many people believe that an immature digestive system may be the problem. Indeed, we know that an infant's digestive tract doesn't have all of the enzymes or digestive juices needed for breaking down food. Another possible cause of colic is an immature nervous system which causes a baby to tense up in response to normal external stimulation.

It is possible that milk – either from the breast or bottle – may cause colic. If the baby is breast-fed, the problem may be due to something the mother is eating or drinking. Dairy products, wheat products, spicy foods, cruciferous vegetables (like broccoli or cabbage), caffeine and alcohol may contribute to a baby's colic. If you bottle-feed, your baby may be allergic to the type of formula you are using.

Colic equally affects boys and girls, first-born children and those born later. In general, it appears around two to four weeks of age and can last for three months, or longer in some cases.

What are the symptoms and complications of infant colic?

The main symptom is continuous crying for long periods of time. Although this crying can occur at any time, it usually worsens in the evening. Beyond crying, a baby with colic may also look uncomfortable and appear to be in pain. Babies may lift their head or legs, become red in the face and pass wind. Some babies refuse to eat or become fussy soon after eating. Difficulty falling and staying asleep is another common symptom.

Normally, colic is not a serious condition. Research shows that babies with colic continue to eat and gain weight normally, despite the hours of crying. The main problem with the condition is the stress and anxiety it creates within the home. Parents and other family members may find it difficult to cope with the constant crying. That's why it is vital to have support and to take a break now and then.

How do doctors recognize infant colic?

Your doctor will examine the baby and ask you for a history of the condition to help exclude any other disorders that may be causing the symptoms. Before you go, try to take note of when your baby cries, eats and sleeps, as well as the pattern of bowel movements. This will provide your doctor with a clear picture of the problem and help determine what is causing it. If your doctor diagnoses colic, there are many things you can do to help your baby – and you – through the next few months.

Symptoms of Infant Colic	<i>Main symptom:</i> Continuous crying	<i>Other symptoms:</i> Look of discomfort Lifting head and/or legs and passing wind Refusal to eat Fussiness after eating Difficulty falling and staying asleep
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How is colic treated?

Self-care action plan

There is no proven cure for colic, but there are several measures that may help your baby feel more comfortable.

You might try a different formula if you bottle-feed. If you breast-feed, don't stop: weaning your baby from breast milk may make the colic worse. Instead, consider changing your diet to see if this stops the colic. You might try cutting out particular foods such as wheat products, spicy foods, alcohol, caffeine or cruciferous vegetables.

If you decide to cut out a number of dairy products, speak to your doctor first and take a calcium supplement. By reintroducing these foods gradually into your diet, you may be able to identify which food, if any, is causing the problem.

If your baby seems to have a lot of wind, make sure you burp him or her frequently. If you bottle-feed, your baby may be swallowing air from the bottle. You might try feeding your baby in a different position, or use a curved bottle or a bottle with a collapsible bag.

To soothe your baby, you might try some or all of the following:

- carry him or her in a front sling or back pack wrap him or her snugly in a blanket (this is called swaddling)
- keep him or her in motion in an infant swing
- place him or her near continuous noise or vibrations from household appliances like the dishwasher, vacuum cleaner or washer-dryer
- take him or her for a car ride or a walk outside
- give him or her a pacifier to suck on
- give him or her gentle tummy massages
- take a shower together – the warm water may be comforting

Is there anything else I should be doing?

Try to take time for yourself. Having a colicky baby can be stressful, frustrating and challenging for any parent, particularly if it is your first child. Listening to a baby crying for hours on end is not easy. If you feel overwhelmed, it is important to take a break. Ask your partner or a friend to take over for a while, even for an hour or two. When you return, you will feel refreshed and better equipped to soothe your crying baby.

What is the outcome of infant colic?

Normally, colic will disappear of its own accord after three to four months