

Infant Colic

All babies cry some of the time, but a baby with colic cries much more of the time. Caring for a baby with colic can be stressful. Colic usually stops by about four months of age and there are no long term effects. There is help available for 'colicky' babies and their parents.

Causes of babies crying

Crying and being unsettled is very common in young babies up to 4 months old. Reasons why babies cry may include:

- hunger
- pain
- too hot or too cold
- need to suck
- wind (gas in the baby's gut)
- overtired
- a need to be cuddled and comforted
- wet or dirty nappy, especially if the baby has nappy rash
- uncomfortable position.

Sometimes there is a medical reason for crying. A doctor can check for a medical

condition or injury that may be causing the baby to cry.

Signs and symptoms of colic

A baby with colic may fuss and cry or scream for some hours. The crying usually begins suddenly at about the same time every day, often in the late afternoon or evening. The baby is usually calm at other times of the day and is healthy and growing well.

The baby may pull up its knees or stretch its legs out stiffly, clench its fists and scream, as if in pain. None of the usual methods (e.g. cuddling, feeding, changing nappy) seem to comfort the child.

Colic usually starts within three weeks of birth and lasts until three to four months of age when it disappears by itself.

What causes colic?

No one knows what causes infant colic, but theories include:

- pain due to muscle spasms (tightening) or wind (gas) in the intestines
- pain due to reflux of stomach acid back up the oesophagus (food pipe)
- the baby is anxious
- the baby senses parent's anxiety or family stress
- food sensitivities or allergies the baby may have. If the baby is breastfed, symptoms may be related to the mother's diet
- smoking – there is some evidence that a woman who smokes is more likely to have a baby with colic.

Self care

Parents may need to try different approaches to find out what (if anything) makes a difference to their baby's colic.

Relieve wind

Babies may swallow air (wind) when crying or feeding. Air may be swallowed during feeding because milk flow is too fast or too slow, or because baby is sucking on an empty breast or bottle. Burping the baby after a feed can reduce wind.

If milk flow is too fast, try expressing a little breast milk before beginning the feed. If bottle feeding, try a teat with a smaller hole.

If milk flow is too slow, check how baby is sucking or try a teat with a larger hole.

Relax and calm baby

Ways to soothe a baby include:

- cuddling and comforting
- wrapping – some babies feel comforted when wrapped snugly
- a pacifier (dummy) – may help calm a baby with a strong need to suck
- movement such as rocking, patting, walking with the baby in a sling, driving in the car, riding in a pram
- soft music – try something with a definite beat or rhythm. A ticking clock may help
- a warm bath
- gentle massage of the baby's stomach and shoulders.

If colic occurs at a regular time, it may help to relax the baby before the usual colic time begins.

Take care of yourself

Work out some ways to help you cope, such as:

- be patient – colic usually stops when the baby is about 4 months old

- prepare for evening colic (e.g. prepare the evening meal early, rest during the day)
- take a break – ask a relative or friend to look after the baby for a while
- share your thoughts and feelings with someone else. It is normal for parents in this situation to feel helpless and frustrated
- share the baby care, and the cooking and household duties with someone else
- make feeding time quiet and relaxed
- keep the phone number of the Australian Breastfeeding Association, or a helpline, close at hand
- learn and use relaxation techniques
- remember – you are not to blame and colic will not harm the baby. Babies with colic still grow and develop normally
- don't smoke near your baby – it may make colic worse.

If you feel frustrated, maybe even to the point of shaking the baby, put the baby down in the cot and leave the room until the feeling goes. Never shake a baby – it may cause permanent damage.

Medicines

Some medicines may help to settle a baby with colic. Ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice before giving medicines to babies or children.

Important

Seek medical advice straight away if you feel you are not coping or if your baby has:

- blood in his/her bowel motions (faeces)
- blood or a green tinge in his/her vomit
- loss of appetite (refusing feeds or feeding less), or fails to gain weight
- repeatedly woken in the night with screaming not related to feeding
- vomiting and/or diarrhoea that is getting worse or has lasted for more than 24 hours
- constipation
- changed from being alert when awake, to being sluggish
- severe, long-lasting swelling of the belly
- a high temperature (38°C or more).

Remember

- Comfort your baby if she/he seems distressed.
- Always check with a doctor before deciding that a baby's crying is colic.
- Talk to a pharmacist or doctor before giving any medicines to a baby.
- ***Never shake a baby.***

For more information

Raising Children Network

Website: raisingchildren.net.au

Australian Breastfeeding Association

(formerly Nursing Mothers)

Breastfeeding Helpline

Phone: 1800 686 268

Website: www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Lifeline

Phone: 13 11 14

(24 hours crisis support)

Website: www.lifeline.org.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthdirect.org.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on
CMI leaflets.

NPS Medicine Wise

Medicines Information Line

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26
from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine*

Related fact cards

- » *Nappy Rash*
- » *Relaxation techniques*
- » *Smoking*
- » *Vomiting and Diarrhoea*

Your Self Care Pharmacy: