



Colic

Colic Basics

- Colic refers to bouts of unexplained crying and fussiness (not due to pain or hunger).
- It can affect up to one-fifth of babies.
- Crying episodes can last for 2-3 hours at a time and often intensify in the early evening.
- During crying spells, babies may scream, extend or pull up their legs, and flex their arms. Sometimes, their abdomens may appear tense from crying or distended from swallowing a lot of air.
- Colic usually starts by the 2nd or 3rd week of life and usually peaks by 6 weeks of age, when the episodes tend to last 3 hours at a time. Gradually, the duration of the crying declines and usually resolves by 3-4 months of age (although it may persist up to 6 months of age).

Causes

Although there has been extensive scientific research on colic, no one knows exactly what causes it. Colic tends to occur in babies that are more sensitive to their surroundings. Hyperstimulation can overwhelm the immature nervous system's ability to "self soothe." As the baby matures, this inability to self-console (marked by excessive crying) will improve.

Colic is not the result of bad parenting, so don't blame yourself. Remember that babies are "born with" colic. Unfortunately, there is no "magic pill" to eliminate colic. The best treatment is time, and all babies will eventually outgrow it. Consult with your pediatrician if it seems like your baby is chronically "colicky" and not just fussy for specific periods during the day. Your doctor can discuss any additional symptoms and help determine whether your child has a medical diagnosis like GERD (acid reflux/heartburn) or cow's milk protein allergy.

Comfort Techniques

Fussy crying related to colic will not cause any harm to your baby. Although the crying can't be completely eliminated, you may be able to comfort your baby and reduce the crying with the following methods:

Rhythmic motions. A soothing, rhythmic activity is one of the best ways to help a baby relax. The following techniques may allow you to help your baby settle down and fall asleep:

- cuddling your child in a rocking chair
- rocking your child in a cradle or bassinet



- swaying side to side while holding your child
- placing your child in a windup swing or vibrating chair
- holding your baby while bouncing on an exercise ball
- going for a stroller ride (outdoors or indoors)

Swaddling or snuggling. This will help your baby feel secure and warm. Swaddling (using a thin blanket) is especially helpful for calming younger babies and can help increase sleep duration. Alternatively, you can place your child in a baby sling or wrap, which keeps her close to you while freeing up your hands.

Calming sounds. This can minimize outside stimuli and help soothe the baby by mimicking the environment of the womb. Try a white noise machine, or run a fan, vacuum, or washer/dryer.

Using a pacifier. The act of sucking is comforting for babies, and a pacifier may be able to provide instant relief.

Feeding strategies:

- If you're nursing, you can try to eliminate milk products, caffeine, onions, cabbage, and any other potentially irritating foods from your own diet.
- If you're formula feeding, consider a protein hydrolysate formula. If food sensitivity is causing the discomfort, the crying symptoms should decrease within a few days of these changes.
- Avoid over-feeding your baby, which could make her even more uncomfortable.

Survival Tips

Get rest when possible and ask for help. Avoid fatigue and extreme exhaustion. Try to nap at least once a day, in case the night goes badly. Ask your partner, friend, neighbor or relative for help around the house and with baby care so that you can get a break. Caring for a colicky baby is a two-person job.

Take breaks. Make sure you have opportunities to get out of the house and clear your mind. These breaks are not acts of selfishness—instead, they will allow you to better nurture and care for your baby.

Talk to someone regularly about your mixed feelings. All parents have contradictory feelings towards their babies. You can still love your child even amidst frustration by her colicky episodes. If you are having difficulty coping, be sure to discuss this with your doctor.

Beware of gimmicks. Many colic "treatments" make extraordinary but unregulated claims. The medicines on the market for colic are often ineffective and some may even be dangerous for children of this age. Talk to your child's doctor about his or her recommendations regarding these treatment options.



Seeking Medical Attention

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- Your baby cries inconsolably for more than 3 hours.
- You are afraid you might hurt your baby.
- Your baby is acting very sick.

Call during office hours if:

- You are having difficulty finding ways to soothe your baby's crying.
- The crying continues after your baby reaches 4 months of age.
- You think your baby may be hungry and not gaining weight.
- You have other concerns or questions.