

Colic

When a healthy infant cries too much, it is called colic. The cause of colic is not known. However, because many physical problems can cause too much crying in an infant, the diagnosis of colic should be made only by a doctor.

Symptoms

Colic usually begins by 2 to 3 weeks of age and lasts up to 3 or 4 months of age. The crying may or may not occur at the same time each day, but usually happens more often in the evening. The baby does not stop crying when usual ways of comforting, such as holding and feeding, are tried. The colicky infant usually shows these signs:

- Flailing arms and legs
- Clenched fists
- Arched back
- Draws legs up toward abdomen
- Struggling and angry when held



Picture 1 Cuddle your baby.

Possible Causes

No one knows the real cause of colic, but some things that *may* be related include:

- Exposure to tobacco smoke
- Immature nervous or digestive system
- Gas pain
- Stomach spasms

Ways to Help

There is no sure treatment for colic, so it may be difficult to comfort your crying baby. The following suggestions have been tried by other parents who have had colicky infants:

- Cuddle your baby (Picture 1).
- Take your baby for a ride in a stroller or car.

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Ways to Help, continued

- Place your baby in a wind-up swing. Prop a young infant with blankets (Picture 2).
- Rock your baby in a rocking chair.
- Give your baby a pacifier. Many infants are soothed by extra sucking.
- Burp the baby often while feeding. This removes air from the baby's stomach and reduces gas. Also try massaging the baby's stomach.
- Play soothing music or tapes of a heartbeat (to soothe you and the baby).
- Carry your baby in a front pack. Walk while holding your baby.
- Run the vacuum cleaner or washer. The constant sound can be a comfort.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your child's doctor if your baby has any of these symptoms:

- Fever
- Diarrhea
- Hard stools
- Poor weight gain
- Excessive spitting up of formula
- Vomiting
- Blood in stools (bowel movements)
- Poor feeding



Picture 2 A swinging movement sometimes helps to soothe the baby.

Things to Remember

A baby who cries too much despite everything you do to comfort him can make the parents nervous and angry. It is important for you to remember the following things:

- Colic is not your fault.
- Your anger and frustration are normal.
- Your baby is not angry with you.
- Your baby is healthy in spite of all the crying.

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Things to Remember, continued

Colic is a common concern. It affects 1 in 4 infants and can cause the entire family a great deal of distress. Usually colic will end between the infant's third and sixth months of life.

Until then, the following suggestions may be helpful:

- Do not feed your baby **every** time he cries.
- Arrange for a relative, friend, or baby-sitter to stay with the baby while you get out of the house one evening a week. Go see a movie, shop, go out to dinner, or just take a walk.
- Try to rest when your baby naps. Getting enough rest will help relieve your tension.
- **Caution: Never shake your baby.** Shaking will not stop the crying and could cause serious brain damage.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor or nurse or call _____.