

# Colic

Newborns with colic have long-lasting periods of crying and fussing. The cause of colic is unknown; several factors probably contribute. Babies usually outgrow colic by 3 months of age. In the meantime, we can recommend a few simple measures that may be helpful.

## What is colic?

Colic is prolonged periods of crying for no apparent reason in an otherwise normal, healthy newborn. Doctors most often define colic as crying for 3 or more hours per day, at least 3 days per week, for at least 3 weeks. Whether or not your baby fits this definition, you may need advice on how to deal with his or her crying.

Doctors don't know exactly what causes colic or why it's a problem for certain babies. A number of factors are probably involved. Taking steps to ensure proper burping and to reduce stress and overstimulation may help to reduce crying. Nearly all infants "outgrow" colic by age 3 to 4 months.

## What does it look like?

- Periods of crying and fussing that last a long time. Compared with "usual" infant behavior, the crying is louder and more intense, and the baby is more difficult to comfort.
- Crying usually occurs around the same time each day—often in the evening.
- Your baby's face may be red and flushed or sometimes pale around the lips.
- Your baby's belly may seem swollen and tense. He or she may pull the legs up over the belly.
- It may seem like nothing you can do helps stop the crying. Your baby may simply continue crying until he or she falls asleep from exhaustion. Sometimes, the crying finally stops when your baby passes gas or has a bowel movement.

## What causes colic?

- Several factors are probably involved, but no clear cause has been identified. Colic does not *necessarily* mean that your baby is having abdominal pain. In some cases, colic seems to be related to a combination of the baby's temperament and the parents' responses.
- For a small number of infants, colic may be related to formula intolerance, swallowing excess air, or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

## What are some possible complications of colic?

- None. Colic attacks rarely continue past 3 or 4 months of age.
- Obviously, having a screaming baby can be very stressful for parents.

## What puts your child at risk of colic?

- Colic usually occurs only in infants between birth and 3 months old.
- There is no way to predict which babies will develop colic. Being overstressed or overtired seems to contribute to the symptoms.

## How is colic treated?

- The first step is to understand the nature of the problem. In many cases, colic seems to reflect the baby's temperament and the parents' responses. Healthy babies cry for lots of reasons; crying doesn't necessarily mean that they are in pain.
- Improve feeding techniques:
  - Make sure to burp your baby after each feeding; hold him or her upright until you hear air coming out of the stomach. Patting the baby gently on the back may help.
  - Feed your baby in a quiet, calm environment. Feed around the same time every night.
  - Avoid overstimulation, especially around feeding time. Try soothing techniques, such as rocking or quiet music.
- Try not to get too upset yourself! High stress and emotion in the parents sometimes seem to contribute to colic attacks. It's difficult, but try to keep your emotions under control. If you really need a break, there's no harm in leaving your baby in his or her crib for a few minutes or with another caretaker.
- If the crying doesn't get better, your doctor may recommend a change in formula. (A small percentage of babies with formula intolerance may have symptoms similar to those of colic.) Remember that the condition is not serious. Babies almost always outgrow it by age 3 months.
- During colic attacks, try different techniques to see what works best for your baby. For example, try holding him or her upright. You may also try placing the baby on his or her belly across your lap, or on a hot-water bottle or heating pad. *Make sure the heating pad is warm, not hot!*

- Gas-reducing drugs (for example, simethicone) or other medications may not help, but your doctor may recommend trying them. Other medications or herbs may be tried as well. However, these are often avoided because of the risk of side effects.
- Colic attacks are very severe or last a very long time.
- Crying is accompanied by other symptoms, such as vomiting, diarrhea, swollen or tender abdomen, or fever.
- Your baby continues having colic attacks after age 3 to 4 months.

 **When should I call your office?**

Call our office if: