



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 three months of age and there are no long term effects. There is help available for 'colicky' babies and their parents.

Signs and symptoms

Babies with colic may fuss and cry intensely for some hours, often in the late afternoon or evening. They are usually calm at other times of the day and are healthy and growing well.

They may pull up their knees or stretch their legs out stiffly, clench their 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. Possible causes include:

- Pain due to intestinal spasms or due to wind (intestinal gas)
- The baby's intestines have not yet fully matured
- Reflux of stomach acid back up the oesophagus
- The baby is anxious

- The baby senses parent's anxiety or family stress
- Baby's feeding or mothers diet, but this is rarely the cause.

There may be a link between parents' smoking and colic.

Causes of crying

Reasons why a baby cries may include:

- Wet or dirty nappy, or nappy rash
- Hunger
- Pain
- Too hot or too cold
- Need to suck
- Wind
- Overtired
- A need to be cuddled and comforted
- Uncomfortable position.

Important

Consult your doctor promptly if your baby has:

- Blood in his/her bowel motions
- Blood or a green tinge in his/her vomit
- Loss of appetite or fails to gain weight
- Woken up over and over 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

- Always check with a doctor before deciding a baby's crying is colic.
- Consult a pharmacist or doctor before giving any medicines to a baby.
- *Never shake a baby*.

Self care

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

Relieving wind:

Babies may swallow air 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. Burping the baby after a feed can reduce wind.

If milk flow is too fast with:

- Breastfeeding – try expressing a little milk before beginning the feed
- Bottle feeding – try a smaller-holed (slower flow) teat.

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

Relax and calm baby with:

- Movement – rocking, 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 warm bath
- Gentle massage of stomach and shoulders
- Some babies feel comforted when wrapped snugly (swaddling)
- A pacifier (dummy) may help calm a baby with a strong need to suck.

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

Take care of yourself:

- Be patient – colic usually stops when the baby is about three 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
- It is normal for parents in this situation to feel helpless and frustrated. Share your thoughts and feelings with someone else
- Share caring for the baby and the cooking and household duties with someone else
- Make feeding time quiet and relaxed

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

- Keep the phone number of the Australian Breast Feeding Association, or a help-line, close at hand
- Learn and practice 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

Certain medicines may help to settle a baby with colic.

For example simethicone helps gas bubbles in the stomach and intestines to escape more easily and may help if the baby has wind.

There is no good evidence that herbal medicines help with colic.

Related fact cards

- *Nappy Rash*
- *Smoking series*
- *Relaxation techniques*
- *Vomiting & diarrhoea*

For more information

Australian Breast Feeding Association (formerly Nursing Mothers) – listed under 'A' in the white pages of the phone book or website www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Your local **Baby, Child or Infant Health Centre** or Service – listed in the white pages of the phone book.

Health/Insite – website www.healthinsite.gov.au

Lifeline – ph. 13 11 14 (24 hours, Australia-wide) or website www.lifeline.org.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacy Self Care Support – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

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

