

Frolic through the Colic

By Kamyar M. Hedayat, MD

The birth of a baby is a blessed event in a family's life, but sometimes taking care of a baby is frustrating. One of those times is colic.

Colic is when a baby fusses and cries a lot. Typically, they draw up their legs and tense up their bellies and their faces turn red. It happens most often between three weeks and three months of age, and usually at the same time of day.

If your baby throws up or has a fever with the crying episodes, has periods of inconsolable crying followed by short periods of calm, or cries for more than three hours in a row, it may be a medical emergency. Contact your doctor right away.

Most babies have just plain old colic. Experts among physicians and grandmothers agree that colic seems to be related to bowel spasms and/or gassiness.

There are a number of things that can help. Not every baby responds to any one treatment, so, try them out until you see what works. First, check to make sure that your baby isn't hot, tired, or hungry. Check for a wet or soiled diaper. Next, try holding the baby. Babies who are held more cry less. Rocking is pleasing to babies and calms them down. Cradle your baby and with an upward motion from the navel to the shoulder *gently* rock him or her back and forth. A car ride around the neighborhood can work too.

Try massaging your infant's tummy. Use a massage oil with chamomile and lavender. A little olive oil from the kitchen will do fine too. Warm it up in your hands. Project a feeling of love and compassion for your child then gently place your hands on their belly. Make a spiral from the belly button outward. Move your hands from the middle of the belly out like you are flattening the pages of a book. Then, starting in the bottom left corner of the belly, gently draw your hands up to the rib cage, across the top of the belly, then down the right side, making an upside down "U". Repeat this sequence for 5-15 minutes.

If you are a nursing mother, avoid foods that cause gassiness, such as cabbage and lentils. They'll make your baby gassy too. Try to consume the following foods, or, their teas: ginger, dill, anise, fennel, caraway, chamomile, or peppermint. You can give your baby up to 1 ounce of these teas once a day in a bottle to help relieve some of the spasm and gas. Gripe water works well too. Make sure that you buy a formulation without alcohol in it. If none of that works, talk to your pediatrician about changing formulas if you formula-feed.

If your baby still is crying, or you feel yourself getting overly frustrated, never, ever shake or hit your baby. As a pediatric intensivist, I have seen babies shaken to death by frustrated parents. Call on family or friends to give you a break if you are feeling frustrated.

Colic only lasts a short time. While frustrating at times for you and uncomfortable for your baby, there are simple solutions to help you frolic through the colic and enjoy your bundle of joy.

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