

COLIC

Does your infant have a regular fussy period each day when it seems you can do nothing to comfort her? This is quite common, particularly between 6:00 p.m. and midnight, just when you, too, are feeling tired from the day's trials and tribulations. These periods of crankiness may feel like torture, especially if you have other demanding children or work to do, but fortunately they don't last long. The length of this fussing usually peaks at about three hours a day by 6 weeks, and then declines to one or two hours a day by 3 months. As long as the baby calms within a few hours and is relatively peaceful the rest of the day, there's no reason for alarm.

If the crying does not stop but intensifies and persists throughout the day or night, it may be caused by colic. About one-fifth of all babies develop colic, usually between the second and fourth weeks. They cry inconsolably, often screaming, extending or pulling up their legs and passing gas. Their stomachs may be enlarged or distended with gas. The crying spells can occur around the clock, although they often become worse in the early evening.



Unfortunately, there is no definite explanation for why this happens. Most often, colic means simply that the child is unusually sensitive to stimulation. As she matures, it will decrease, and generally it stops by 3 months. Sometimes, in breastfeeding babies, colic is a sign of sensitivity to a food in the mother's diet. The discomfort is only rarely caused by sensitivity to milk protein in

formula. Colicky behavior may signal a medical problem, such as a hernia or some type of illness.

Coping with Colic

You may find it reassuring that there's a time limit to colic, but that doesn't stop the crying now. You may have to wait it out, but there are several things that might be worth trying. First, of course, consult your pediatrician to rule out any medical reason for the crying. Then ask him which of the following would be most helpful.

If nursing, eliminate milk products, soy, wheat, nuts, caffeine, onions, cabbage and any other potentially irritating foods from your diet. If bottle-feeding, try a formula that has no cow's milk. If food sensitivity is causing the discomfort, the colic should decrease within a day or two of these changes.

Walk your baby in a body carrier to soothe her. The motion and body contact will reassure her, even if her discomfort persists.

Rock her, run the vacuum in the next room, or place her where she can hear the clothes dryer. Steady rhythmic motion and sound may help her fall asleep.

Introduce a pacifier. While some breastfed babies will actively refuse it, it will provide instant relief for others.

Lay your baby tummy-down across your knees and gently rub her back. The pressure against her abdomen may help relieve her pain.

Swaddle her in a blanket so that she feels secure and warm. Hold and soothe your baby when she cries – you can't spoil a baby until 6 months old.

When you're feeling tense and anxious, have someone else look after the baby and get out of the house. Even an hour or two away will help you maintain a positive attitude. No matter how impatient or angry you feel, do not shake the baby. Shaking an infant hard can cause blindness, brain damage or even death.

Call your pediatrician if you have any concerns or are overwhelmed.

Excerpted from [*Caring for Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5*](#), Bantam 1999

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