



Infantile Colic

What is colic?

Colic is defined as crying and extreme irritability in infants. The fits of inconsolable crying tend to occur in the evening, but many infants do not follow a predictable pattern. The crying and fussiness can last for hours at a stretch, followed by other periods when the baby acts and seems perfectly comfortable.

How common is colic? What causes colic?

Colic is very common, affecting 1 in 4 newborns. The reason for the irritability is not totally clear but includes an immaturity of the baby's nervous system, sleeping disruption, hypersensitivity to the environment and sensory overload. Only a small fraction of the children with colic will actually be suffering from identifiable medical conditions as gastroesophageal reflux or food allergies. These other possibilities will be discussed with your health care provider before a diagnosis of colic is made.

What are the symptoms of colic?

Typically, colic follows the "rule of threes"; crying begins by three weeks of age, it last for at least three hours of a day and it occurs for at least three days a week. The colicky baby will start crying at the top of their lungs, as if in apparent pain, turning red in the face, kicking the legs, arching and passing gas. Sometimes, feedings will temporarily stop the screaming, only to resume when the nipple is taken or pushed away. Colicky infants continue to gain weight and grow normally.

How is colic diagnosed?

There is no specific treatment, but much can be done to minimize the impact on the parents of this exhausting problem. Often, the baby's formula is changed to one that is hypoallergenic (Nutramigen, Alimentum or Good Start, among others). Some mothers will modify their own diet, removing gas forming foods or dairy products. If acid reflux is suspected, antacids can be tried and continued if they clearly help. In most cases, what is needed is a lot of patience. Parents and other family members should take turns with the baby's care. Infant massage, soothing music, and swaddling can help the days pass for a colicky baby. Above all, do not shake your baby!!

What can you expect?

Colic will hopefully resolve by the time your baby is three months old. Sometimes, the fussiness lasts for a few more weeks or months. The prognosis is excellent. If you are worried, or you note any changes that concern you, always discuss them with your health care provider.

IMPORTANT REMINDER: This information from the North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (NASPGHAN) is intended only to provide general information and not as a definitive basis for diagnosis or treatment in any particular case. It is very important that you consult your doctor about your specific condition.