

The Crying Baby and How to Cope

...when the baby is thriving but the parents aren't

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What if there are periods in the late afternoon or evening where your baby just cries for hours no matter what you do?



All babies cry to tell us when they need something. Over the first month of a baby's life parents develop skills to console their baby and to sense what their baby needs. But some babies are very difficult to console. What if there are periods in the late afternoon or evening where your baby is inconsolable? The glow of having a newborn fades and parents become exhausted from lack of sleep. So many moms and dads understandably get frustrated, discouraged and even depressed.

When crying lasts longer than three hours a day and is not caused by another medical problem, we call it *colic*. *Colic* and fussiness certainly cause parents and babies to develop a different relationship, one with increased holding, singing, ssshhh'ing, which may be part of the biology of it. But that doesn't mean it is okay for parents and babies to suffer through this difficult time. It often begins around 3 weeks of age and peaks between 4 and 6 weeks of age. For most, the intensity increases in the evenings. Thankfully it fades away at about age three months.

What is most helpful for parents is to know they are good parents. *Colic* is not caused by poor parenting. A mother of four children told me, "No matter what I do, I can't console my new baby. I promise you I am the same parent I was for my other children, but this baby won't be consoled for hours in the evening. It's like the bewitching time." *Colic* is a real thing!

With *colic*, the baby is thriving and has a normal examination. Sometimes food allergy or gastroesophageal reflux need to be ruled out, the toes checked to make sure there isn't a hair wrapped around one of them, or any other medical issue. No medication has been shown to be safe and effective for colic.

Any degree of increased crying by your baby is upsetting and we wish there was a magic fix. Here are some suggestions that can be helpful. Every baby will respond to different tricks:

1. Holding and motion: your arms, a car ride, a swing. Additionally a lullaby often helps too because your child wants to hear what you have to say and may quiet themselves to do so.

2. Aiding with gas: as they cry more, they swallow more air, so abdominal massage, and even whole body massage tends to be soothing. Gas medications such as simethicone (*Mylicon*) are harmless but don't work.

3. Breastfeeding moms: should avoid gas producing foods. If food allergy is the cause of your child's crying, by far the most common cause is milk allergy. A one week trial of avoiding all dairy: milk, (casein or whey protein) will answer this question. If there is not a dramatic improvement,

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it is probably not from food allergy. So many online blogs and friends may ask, "are you eating something that may be causing your baby pain?" Eliminating a lot of foods at once just deprives a mom. It makes her stress even worse. With or without most "bad foods" in a mom's diet, colic gradually improves anyway. Some well intentioned advice may just stress parents more.

Formula fed babies need no more than a one week trial of an allergy free formula (nutramigen, alimentum, neocate, etc.). Unless there is a significant improvement, we recommend going back to your original choice of formula. Please check in with your pediatrician to choose the best formula for your baby. We do not recommend switching from type to type or brand to brand every couple of days to see if it helps with the crying.

4. Soothing sounds: white noise, fans, car motors, hair dryers seem to help in many studies looking at colic treatments. Many "white noise" shushing devices are available.

5. Swaddling and Sleep: to help calm your baby's body and aid sleep, swaddling them really does help even if they initially try to wiggle out of it. The more babies sleep during the day, the smoother their evening will be and the more successful night time sleep will be.

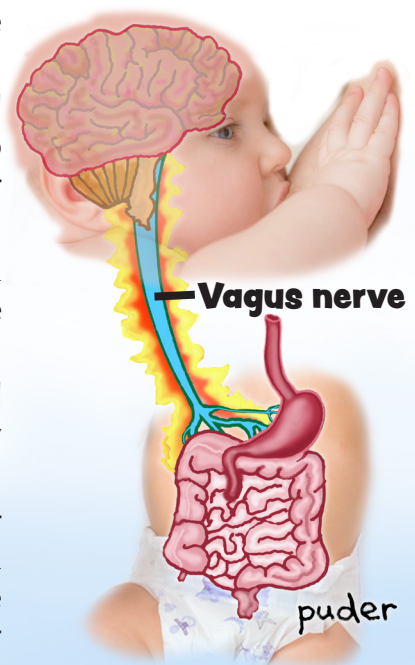
6. Probiotics: compared to placebo, taking beneficial bacteria reduces crying in several (but not all) studies. Speak to us for some suggestions to try.

7. Gas relief and herbal remedies: both safe to try and possibly helpful in a small number of babies. Most studies show they don't do much.

8. Take a break: take turns with a partner to care for your crying baby. You can't hold a crying baby hour after hour without a break, it is intolerable! If you need to, set your baby down in a safe place and walk away to calm yourself. Ask a friend or family member to come over to hold the baby even for a short while so you can just rest. Emotions you never thought you would have (frustration, anger, shame) add to the the intensity of the moment. You will be able to pay more loving attention to your baby when you've had a chance to get refreshed.

9. This won't last forever: know that with each passing week, the fussiness should improve. Colic generally resolves by age 3 months. If it isn't getting better, a recheck at our office is always welcomed to discuss your baby's health and development.

10. So what causes colic? Even though it looks like it's from the intestines, it is an over-sensitivity in the vagus nerve (which connects the brain to the intestinal tract). Some babies seem to experience sensory overload in the first three months. But don't worry, these sensitive babies will show their wonderful personalities soon. And if parents hang in there, the "happily ever after" part is coming!



**sensitive nerve,
normal intestines**

