

Colic and crying

Healthy babies cry. It's the way they express their needs and communicate with the people around them. Most of the time, you respond with what your baby needs: by offering food, helping your baby sleep, changing a diaper, or just cuddling. Crying is important for babies because they depend on other people to meet all of their needs.

But, there are times when even the most caring parent can't soothe a baby's cries. Remember, it is not your fault.

When a baby cries long and hard (without a break) even though he's been fed, changed, and cuddled, the baby is said to be "colicky." For a long time, people thought that colic was a "condition"—some babies have it, and others don't.

New information suggests that what used to be called colic is actually a normal part of a baby's development.

All babies go through a period early in life when they cry more than at any other time.

Each baby is different. During this "peak" period—which is usually sometime between 3 and 8 weeks—some babies may cry much more than others. Their crying may seem stronger, and it may be harder (sometimes impossible!) to soothe.

There is good news, though. First, it's normal. And there's no lasting effect on your baby. Second, it won't last forever. This period of strong, intense (and unexplained) crying can end as quickly as it started, or it may gradually decrease over time. Usually, it's over by the time your baby is 3 to 4 months old.

In the meantime, here are some ideas to help you get through what can be a stressful time.

Why do some babies cry more than others do?

Some experts believe that babies who cry more than others have a more sensitive temperament (their individual nature) and have difficulty controlling their crying. They may have more trouble self-soothing and settling into their natural body rhythms when they are very young.

Generally, it hasn't been shown that there is anything wrong with the bowels of babies who cry long and hard. And there is not strong evidence that the crying is caused by gas, wind or food allergies. In fact, crying causes babies to swallow air, which they burp up or pass as wind. Because they strain and tighten their stomach muscles, this also forces air out of the rectum.

What can you do to help soothe a crying baby?

Each baby is unique, and what helps soothe one baby may not work for another. The challenge is finding what works for you and your baby.

Here are some suggestions that might calm your baby or help prevent crying when your child is fussy:

- Check to see if your baby needs something—a diaper change, a feeding, relief from being too hot or too cold, or attention for a fever.
- Hold your baby. This will not spoil him. However, some babies do not like being passed from person to person.
- Wrap or swaddle your baby.
- Turn off the lights and keep surroundings quiet. Too much stimulation can often trigger crying or make it worse.
- Soft music, white noise or a gentle shushing noise can soothe some babies.
- Many babies are soothed by motion. Try walking with baby in a sling/wrap or in a stroller. Rock or sway with your baby in a gentle, rhythmic motion. Try going for a ride in the car.
- Sucking sometimes helps babies to calm and relax. Encourage your baby to breastfeed or offer a pacifier.
- Give your baby a warm bath.

Talk to your doctor before using over-the-counter or natural remedies for colic. There is still very little scientific evidence to support the effectiveness of any medicine or probiotic for the treatment of colic.

Whatever you do, it should be gentle and soothing. **Never shake your baby.** If you are frustrated by the crying, despite your best efforts to help your baby, put her in a safe place (like her crib) and take a moment to calm yourself.

Remember: There are times when nothing works even though you try everything. This doesn't mean you are a bad parent.

Is my baby crying because of something he ate? Or something I ate?

Colic happens in both breastfed and bottle-fed babies. Changing how you feed your baby (for example switching from breastfeeding to formula feeding, or from one kind of formula to another) probably won't help your baby. If you think your baby may have an allergy to cow's milk, speak to your doctor about your options. This is a very rare condition.

Call your doctor to make an appointment if:

- Your baby isn't behaving as usual and isn't eating or sleeping.
- Your baby has a fever.
- Your baby is vomiting, has diarrhea or bloody stools.
- Your baby could be hurt from a fall or injury.
- Your baby cries excessively for more than 3 months.
- You're afraid you might hurt your baby.

Where can you go for help?

The early days of taking care of a new baby can be hard. You're probably not sleeping much, and you're trying to meet your baby's needs around the clock.

A baby's constant crying can be stressful. The most important thing to know is that it is not your fault. **It will get better.** In the meantime, be sure to take care of yourself.

Make arrangements for regular child care relief so you can get some rest. Find a friend, family member or someone else you trust who can look after your baby for short periods of time while you get a break. If people offer help, accept it. Remember:

- Eating and sleeping well can make a big difference in how well you can cope. Try to get at least 3 hours of sleep in a row, twice a day.
- Parents need breaks. Take some time to exercise, read or enjoy a visit with a friend at a local café.
- Sometimes you may have negative thoughts. It's OK, as long as you don't act on them. If you feel depressed, resentful or angry, talk to someone you trust and get help.
- There are many community resources that support parents, particularly new mothers. If you're not sure where to go, talk to your paediatrician, family physician, or public health nurse.

More information from the CPS:

- Never shake a baby
- Swaddling

Reviewed by the following CPS committees:

- Nutrition and Gastroenterology Committee
- Public Education Advisory Committee

Last Updated: **July 2016**

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