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healthy kids

child

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FROM PRE-BIRTH TO 12



Cuddling can
comfort your
little one's
distress.

get through colic

All babies cry. But if you know that the reason behind a particular episode is colic, you can help your baby and yourself through it. by **SUJA NATARAJAN**

BABY and crying go hand in hand. But when a baby cries inconsolably for no reason, doctors call it colic. However, colic is not a disease or a diagnosis but a harmless condition, which causes significant distress to infants. Known as a mystery condition, it surfaces during the first few weeks of birth and resolves on its own. Nearly 40 per cent of all infants have colic, whether breastfed or formula-fed*. "Infant colic starts in the first month, within a couple of weeks after birth. It can go on until the age of 3 or 4 months, when it tends to abate and disappear on its own," says Mumbai-based Dr. PV Vaidyanathan, Consulting Paediatrician and author of *Doctor, Why Is My Baby Crying?* Learn what makes your baby cry non-stop and ways to soothe her.

* spot it

The symptoms of colic include intense crying episodes with curled-up legs and clenched face or fists. The condition surfaces when the baby is 2 to 3 weeks old. "A colicky baby cries repeatedly for 3 to 4 minutes, with a gap when he is peaceful, and then starts again," Dr. Vaidyanathan explains. "When he attempts to expel the trapped wind in the intestine, he draws up his thighs towards his abdomen," says *Child* Advisor Dr. Sarath Gopalan, Senior Paediatric gastroenterologist, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital and Saket City Hospital, Delhi. Episodes of colic have chances of peaking at around 6 weeks and reduce between 3 to 6 months.

* know about it

According to Dr. Vaidyanathan, there is no single scientifically-established cause for colic. "Immature gut, difficulty in digesting milk (mother's milk or formula*), a mother's diet, her

emotional state and excess feeding are a few of the implicated factors. Colic is more in babies fed on formula* milk, as compared to exclusively breastfed babies," he says. Let us look at the two most common causes.

AEROPHAGIA The usual reason for colic in babies is the swallowing of air along with milk, more commonly known as aerophagia. "When you don't hold the bottle as vertically as possible, air is collected on the top of the bottle with the milk at the bottom. When a baby takes in a lot of air along with the milk, the air trapped in the intestine causes bloating, which then leads to pain and discomfort," says Dr. Gopalan.

➔ Episodes of colic have chances of peaking at around 6 weeks and reduce between 3 to 6 months of age.

DIGESTIVE ISSUES The gut motility of a baby, which develops over a period of time, is also one of the factors related to colic. "This can happen in preemies when a baby hasn't learned the art of suckling and the intestine is still learning to adjust," explains Dr. Gopalan. "Also, since breastmilk is lighter and easier to digest when compared to top feed, babies who are formula-fed* are more likely to be colicky," he adds.

* prevent it

Although you cannot really prevent colic, there are a few measures to consider to reduce the frequency of colic episodes. "Feed your baby every two hours and burp her well

after every feed. See that you are not stressed out and anxious. A calm mother is likely to tackle colic in a mature manner and will help to comfort the baby," explains Dr. Vaidyanathan.

Adds Dr. Gopalan, "When you are breastfeeding, hold your baby in the correct position. Support her head in a slightly elevated position and ensure she grasps the nipple completely in her mouth. This will let her suck only the milk and not the air." If a baby suffers from blocked nose, she will release the nipple while feeding to breathe and may, hence, draw in a lot of air in the process. Keeping the nose clear will help your baby suck only milk. If you are bottle-feeding, keep the bottle as vertically as possible so that air does not get collected in the bottle.

* help baby through it

With trial and error, a few techniques have been found to help colicky babies. While some respond to these, other babies may not respond at all. Here's what you can try:

- **Get moving** Swing or rock your baby gently or take a walk with him. Cuddling can also soothe your little one's discomfort.
- **Massage the belly** Massaging your baby's tummy in small clockwise circles or moving her legs as if riding a bicycle can do wonders to release the trapped gas. Applying a warm compress on your child's tummy also provides temporary relief.
- **Distract him** Sing a song and use white background noise, such as that of a hair dryer, washing machine, or the sounds of nature to soothe your baby's frayed nerves.
- **Apply pressure on the tummy** Lay your baby on his tummy and gently rub his back to allow gas to escape. Do this only when your

*See Resource for Important Notice.



Moving Baby's legs as if riding a bicycle can release trapped gas.

baby is strong enough to support his head in the rollover position.

● **Seek medical intervention** Visit the doctor if none of the remedies work. "Once the doctor determines that the condition is colic, he may prescribe carminative and anti-flatulent mixtures to ease the pain," says Dr. Vaidyanathan. "Antispasmodic agents are likely to help as they relax the intestinal muscles. For a sustained response, scientific studies abroad suggest the use of probiotics, especially *lactobacillus reuteri* (a probiotic agent)," says Dr. Gopalan.

* help yourself through it

Colic can be a frustrating phase of parenthood. Anger, despair and helplessness are the common

➔ Remember that colic is not a sign of bad parenting but is a temporary and harmless condition.

results of handling a bawling baby. However, a bit of awareness and patience can help you sail through this difficult period.

- **Take a break** If your stress levels are rising, seek help from friends or relatives to watch your baby, while you take a quick break. Even 30 minutes away from Baby can do you wonders.
- **Connect with others** Seek support from moms in person or online to discuss and give vent to

your feelings. Also share your feelings with your partner. This helps to maintain your sanity.

- **Track the pattern** Keeping a record of how well your baby feeds, sleeps, poops or pees will help you find a pattern to the problem. If you are breastfeeding, then you should make it a point to track your eating habits to eliminate foods that could be causing colic and see if your baby's symptoms improve over a period of time.
- **Know that you are not alone** It is quite normal to feel helpless, guilty or angry when your baby refuses to calm down. But remember that colic is not a sign of bad parenting. It is a temporary and harmless condition that improves in a few months. ●

➔ Is it really colic?

When a baby is bawling her lungs out, it can often be difficult to identify the problem in all that chaos. Knowing how to differentiate a colicky baby from a hungry or a sick baby may help you. Colic pain starts in the evening, the baby cries in spurts and the pain resolves in the middle of the night. A colicky baby doesn't respond well to feeding and other routine care, but she is typically peaceful in the mornings and afternoons. On the other hand, a hungry baby stops crying once fed, while a baby suffering from infection will cry continuously and will not be peaceful even during the day.

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