

# Colic

Did you know that as many as 30 out of 100 babies have colic?



*Colic generally does not require professional treatment unless your baby also has vomiting, diarrhea, or other signs of a more serious illness.*

Colic is not a disease. It is a condition that makes even healthy babies cry for hours, usually in the evening and at night. Doctors aren't sure what causes colic.

All babies cry, so how do you know if your baby has colic?

Colic usually follows the "rule of three." Crying:

1. starts in the first three months after birth
2. lasts for more than three hours a day
3. happens more than three days a week

Here's the good news: Colic goes away as the baby matures. It almost always ends by the fourth month and sooner for many babies. Although no single method always works to relieve colicky babies, there are many things you can try. Unfortunately, what works one time may not work the next. So, you'll need to be creative and persistent.

## Home treatment

- **Most important: Stay calm and try to relax.** Hearing your baby cry is stressful, and you may feel angry at times. If you start to lose control, take a minute to calm down. Never shake a baby. This can cause permanent brain damage and even death.

- **Make sure that your baby is getting enough to eat** (but not too much). The problem may be hunger, not colic. Breastfed babies usually eat well when they are hungry. They also tend to stop eating when they are full, so don't force your baby to continue nursing, or to finish a bottle.
- **Make sure that your baby isn't swallowing too much air while eating.** Feed your baby slowly, holding him or her almost upright. Burp your baby periodically. Prop your baby up for 15 minutes after feeding.
- **If you feed your baby with a bottle, check the size of the hole in the nipple.** It should be big enough to drip at least one drop per second of cold formula. If the hole is too small, babies will swallow more air from around the nipple.
- **Heat formula to body temperature.** Don't overheat.
- **Babies need to suck up to two hours a day to be satisfied.** Once nursing is going well, offer your baby a pacifier between feedings.
- **Keep a regular routine for meals, naps, and playtime.** Mealtime should be quiet and undisturbed by bright lights and loud noise.

- Sometimes a wet diaper can make a baby fussy. Make sure that your baby's diaper is clean.
- Make sure that your baby isn't too hot or cold or simply bored.
- Try rocking your baby. Placing the baby stomach-down over your knee or forearm may also help. (Remember to place your baby on his or her back to sleep.)
- Calm your baby with a walk outside or a ride in the car. Placing your baby near the hum of a clothes dryer, dishwasher, or bubbling aquarium may be soothing.
- Try swaddling your baby, especially at naptime and at night. Some babies feel secure when they are wrapped up snugly.
- Don't worry about "spoiling" a baby during the first three months. Comforting your baby makes both of you feel better.
- Don't let your baby cry alone for more than 5 to 10 minutes during the first three months. After 10 minutes, try one or more of the suggestions above again.
- Try keeping a diary to see when your baby cries most often. This will also help you know how long your baby is crying at a time.

## Colic and the caregiver

- You may be worried or frustrated that you cannot comfort your baby. Remember that colic is an extreme form of normal crying, not a disease.
- Take care of yourself so that you can take care of your baby. Get as much sleep as you can, and try to eat well.
- It's okay to ask for help with your baby when you need to take a break.
- Your baby's crying is hard on all family members. It is normal to feel frustrated, but try not to blame anyone.
- Remind yourself that colic is temporary. The crying won't last forever.

## When to call Kaiser Permanente

Colic generally does not require professional treatment unless your baby also has vomiting, diarrhea, or other signs of a more serious illness. If your baby looks healthy and acts normally between episodes—and if your emotions can stand the noise for the first three months—you have little reason to worry.

However, if colic lasts for more than four hours a day, or if you feel like you need help, ask your doctor for advice.

In rare cases, colic may be so severe that you and your doctor may consider a medication. Ask about side effects.

If you feel that you might lose control and hurt your baby, immediately call your doctor or someone you trust.

Colic will stop on its own—usually by the time your baby is three months old.

Try not to take your baby's crying personally. Colic is not your fault.

## Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at [kp.org](http://kp.org).
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.
- *The Happiest Baby on the Block*, by Harvey Karp, M.D., 2002.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your child's physician or other health care professional. If your child has persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your child's doctor.

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