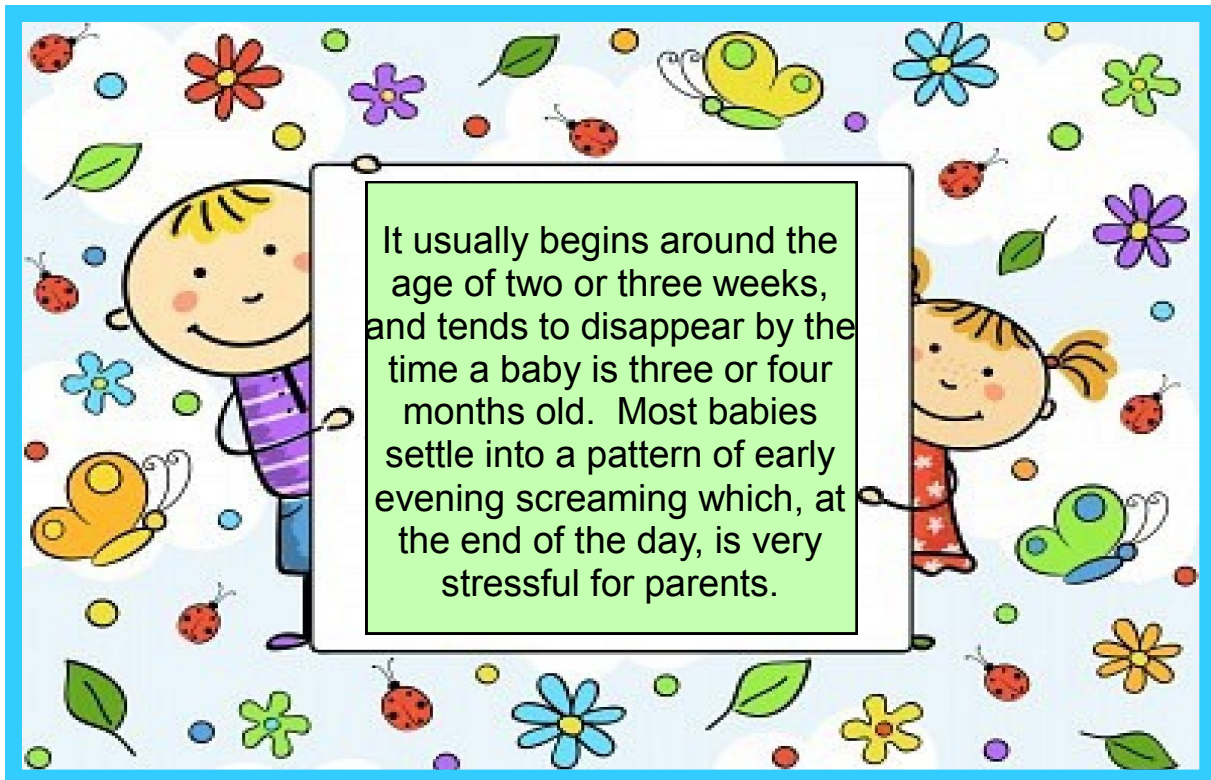


Tell me all about

Colic





It usually begins around the age of two or three weeks, and tends to disappear by the time a baby is three or four months old. Most babies settle into a pattern of early evening screaming which, at the end of the day, is very stressful for parents.

What causes colic and who can get it?

Doctors are not entirely sure why some babies have colic, and others don't.

It seems that in colicky babies the normally smooth squeezing of the guts that move food along are replaced by spasms causing pain and distress. At one time, excess wind was thought to be the problem. But tests indicate that colicky babies have no more wind in their guts than others. Wind does make a problem worse though as it's trapped in the loops of the gut during spasms.

A more recent theory suggests an immature nervous system, not yet able to fully control the gut properly. This would explain why the problem disappears as a baby gets older.

Other ideas include the possibility that it's related to the working of hormones in the gut, or an allergic reaction to cow's milk. It's true to say that among colic sufferers, there will be some whose distress is caused either by a short or long term intolerance of cow's milk or other food.

Any baby can be affected. A baby's sex, birth weight, birth order, weight gain or whether they're breast or bottle fed doesn't change the chances of developing colic.

What are the signs and symptoms of colic?

Babies seem to have tummy ache, drawing their knees up to their stomach during screaming fits, and may clench their fists.

How is it normally treated?

Medication for colic consists of gripe water and infacol. Both are available in your local chemist. Anti spasmotic medication is no longer recommended for babies under the age of six months—there have been a number of reported side effects in recent years.

When to ask for medical help

Research has shown that babies with colic are generally healthy and growing well.

If your baby's problems haven't disappeared by the age of five months though, food intolerance should be seriously considered and you should see your GP.

What else will help?

Different things work for different families. Parents naturally use movement to calm infants. Carry your baby around in different positions: on your shoulder, cradled in your arms, lying along your forearm on his/her tummy. Try sitting in a rocking chair with your baby on your knee or shoulder—the rhythmic movement might help. You could also take your baby out for a walk.

Noise can help, in particular white noise such as static from a radio. It's thought this reminds a baby of noises heard in the womb and while it's not soothing for you, it may comfort your baby. Try other noises that may be familiar too such as the vacuum cleaner or washing machine.

Sucking can provide relief as it can be comforting and a distraction from pain. Sometimes a baby will root as though looking for food but cries again when feeding. If you think it is comfort sucking rather than food your baby needs, offer your little finger or a sterilised dummy. Natural shaped dummies are available for breastfed babies.

As a last resort, try taking to the road. Some parents say the combination of the sound of the car engine and movement sends their baby to sleep. Take another adult with you though. Driving with a screaming baby can be very stressful.

Mothers who are breastfeeding should avoid citrus high sugar fruits as these can give babies loose poos which cause tummy ache. Some parents say drinking fennel tea works although no real evidence to support this. It may be worth trying though. Drinks for babies that contain fennel are available at local pharmacies.

Massage isn't a new idea but it's one that's being rediscovered. Most babies find massage soothing and it might help them feel more settled. Start a massage when your baby is awake and calm. Make sure the room's warm enough for your baby to be undressed without feeling cold, and lie your baby on something soft in front of you or on your lap. Talk reassuringly, warm some baby oil on your hands and lightly stroke your baby's hands and feet, then stroke the whole length of the limbs with a mixture of circular and straight stroking movements. If your baby seems to be enjoying it. Move onto the body then the neck and head. Stroke the back of your baby's neck with your fingers and brush the temples with the back of your hand. Also gently knead your baby's earlobes between your finger and thumb.

It can be difficult to know whether anything's working at all. Keep a diary for a week and record the number of times your baby cries., how long crying lasts, what you tried and how effective it was. This could help you decide whether anything is helping—and whether you need extra support.

Is there any help for parents?

Caring for a crying colicky baby is very hard work and can put an enormous strain on parents. Extra support is invaluable. See if a reliable friend or relative could look after your baby for an evening so you can have a break. Make sure you see other adults every day.

Even though health professionals can't do much, it may help to talk—discuss the problem with your health visitor.

Looking forward

As your baby gets older, he/she should start to settle a little earlier each night. Many parents find they reach a turning point when their baby is around 13 weeks.

Further help and advice:

Cry-sis offers advice and support to anyone caring for a sleepless or crying baby. Lines are open from 9am—10pm, seven days a week: 08451 228669

Or visit the website: www.cry-sis.org.uk

Nightingale Ward: 01246 512324/01246 512328

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