

How To Deal With Infant Colic

When you first hold that precious newborn baby in your arms, everything you were told by friends and family members about instantly falling in love comes back to the front of your mind. They were right. With the traumatic experience of labour fast becoming a distant memory, you become completely overwhelmed with emotion by this tiny bundle of joy. You can't wait to feed her for the first time, take her home, lay her in her very own cot, watch her sleep, show her off to your loved ones. She's the new love of your life! For the first few days, or perhaps weeks, things go well, save for a few hiccups: maybe a little trouble getting the hang of breastfeeding or a little anxious about how to hold her. Then a sneaky little devil by the name of Colic bursts onto the scene, seemingly out of nowhere: sometimes painful-sounding crying that seems to last forever, night after night after night. She barely sleeps for longer than 20 minutes at a time and you begin to wonder if something is seriously wrong with her. It seems as if nothing you do will soothe her, or if it does, never for very long. You're suffering from lack of sleep yourself and the stress of hearing your baby screaming for so long pushes you to the edge of your patience. So what do you do?

Unfortunately, if you ask this question to your doctor or midwife you're likely to get a response along the lines of 'Sorry, there is no known cause or cure for Colic, but she should grow out of it by about 3 months of age'. Great. Only another 3 months to go then. When one night seems to last an eternity, the thought of 3 months of a colicky baby every single night is enough to make you want to jump out the nearest window! However, there are ways of dealing with Colic that doctors or midwives probably aren't aware of. There are some simple techniques that you can use that may help rid your baby of Colic.

Most believe the main cause of Colic to be trapped wind, probably occurring during feeds when the baby swallows pockets of air along with her milk. With her stomach only the size of her own fist, it's no wonder she's so inconsolable. As soon as you suspect your baby may be hungry, feed her before she gets too upset. Overly hungry babies often frantically gulp as soon as they are put to breast or bottle, resulting in some mouthfuls of air. Now, don't be fooled into thinking that if you're breastfeeding, this isn't a problem. All it takes is a small loss of suction and down goes a gulp of air instead of milk. You can often hear it gurgling all the way to poor baby's stomach! Whether breastfeeding or bottle-feeding, you need to try and prevent this air-swallowing. If breastfeeding, ensure baby is latched on properly. Her lips should be flanged out the way and she should have the majority of your areola in her mouth. As you're probably already aware, it does sting a little if she tries to suck the very end of your nipple and it doesn't help her milk extraction either. You shouldn't hear any loud sucking or smacking noises: if you do, gently remove her and start again. Don't worry about seemingly smothering her with your breast: babies facial features are designed to cope with this. Good attachment also applies to bottle-feeders, but you must take extra care when holding the bottle to make sure that the teat is always full of milk. Towards the end of a bottle feed, be sure to remove the bottle from baby's mouth before she finishes every drop. Leaving a little in the bottom ensures she doesn't end her feed with a huge suck of air into the stomach.

The position in which you feed your baby can also have an effect on any air that she does swallow. If you feed her in as close to an upright position as you can without straining yourself or the baby, any air that is accidentally swallowed should easily rise to the surface to be burped up, without the unwelcome bonus of half-digested milk!

After feeding, thoroughly burp your baby, regardless of whether she's breast- or bottle-fed. I was once told that breastfed babies don't need to be burped but this is not true. Try burping her in different positions. Rubbing her stomach or gently patting her back while holding her either seated in an upright position, over one shoulder or perhaps across your lap, should expel some air bubbles. Try gently bouncing her on your knee too, as a little movement may encourage the bubbles to come up to the surface. You can also burp her periodically during the feed and remember that if she has swallowed a lot of air, burping it all up will have cleared some room for more milk so she may want to go back for more.

Once you've fed her in a suitable position, ensuring she's latched on properly to teat or nipple and thoroughly burped her, you can then begin your sleep-time ritual. One calming position that I found particularly effective is this: sitting comfortably, bring your knees up towards your chest and place baby in the cup shape made by your body. Have her positioned chest to chest, with her head to one side so she can hear your breathing and heartbeat. This will help soothe her, especially if you are relaxed and breathing slowly and steadily. She will appreciate the body heat from skin-to-skin contact, which is also very calming for baby. Continue to gently pat or rub her back, which will help raise those last few stubborn air bubbles and provide a comforting mini-massage that should encourage her to sleep.

Once she has drifted off, gently take her to bed and place her on her left side, which aids digestion and may result in a few final burps. If she opens her eyes, don't panic just yet! She may just be checking on where she is or getting herself comfortable. Let her do this. If she does become agitated, gently stroke her cheek or forehead to reassure her or, if needed, a little rocking or swaying should calm her down again.

These techniques are not a definite cure. Every baby is different and you, as the parent, can probably tell if something is not working. Play around with different feeding positions, burping techniques and night-time rituals until you find something she finds more comfortable. It may just be that she's having a little trouble getting used to her new life. Go with the signs your baby is giving you. If you are particularly concerned that her endless crying may be for a more serious reason, do consult your doctor or midwife. If all else fails, try to console yourself with the fact that this phase will not last forever and she will eventually grow out of it, probably sooner than you think.

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