

## What is infant colic?

It is the occurrence in a well baby of regular, unexplained periods of inconsolable crying and fretfulness, usually in the late afternoon and evening, especially between 2 weeks and 16 weeks of age. No cause for the abdominal pain can be found, and it lasts for a period of at least 3 weeks.

It is very common and occurs in about one-third of infants.

## What are the typical features?

- Baby between 2 and 16 weeks old
- Prolonged crying—at least 3 hours
- Crying worst at around 10 weeks of age
- Crying during late afternoon and early evening
- Occurs at least 3 days a week
- Child flexes legs and clenches fists because of the ‘gut ache’
- Child gets better naturally with time

## The myths of infant colic

It is important for concerned parents to know that the colic is *not* caused by the mother’s or family’s anxiety, by artificial feeding or by food allergy.

Unfortunately, the problem does tend to cause tensions in the family, but it must be emphasised that the baby will thrive, the condition will pass away and the parents are not responsible for the colic.

## Some cautionary advice

This can be a danger time for child abuse by frustrated parents, so please speak to someone about any troublesome feelings. Remember that it is no one’s fault and it will soon settle. You must avoid using fad diets or herbal treatments for the baby.

## What is the treatment?

- Use gentleness (such as subdued lighting where the baby is handled, soft music, speaking softly, quiet feeding times).
- Avoid quick movements that may startle the baby.
- The advice from and close contact with a maternal or child health nurse is most helpful.
- Advice from the Nursing Mothers Association is helpful.
- Make sure the baby is not hungry—underfeeding can make the baby hungry.
- If the baby is breastfed, express the watery foremilk before putting the baby to the breast.
- Provide demand feeding (in time and amount).
- Make sure the baby is burped and give posture feeding.
- Provide comfort from a dummy or pacifier.
- Provide plenty of gentle physical contact.
- Cuddle and carry the baby around (e.g. take a walk around the block).
- A carrying device such as a ‘snuggly’ or a ‘Meh Tai Sling’ allows the baby to be carried around at the time of crying.
- Make sure the mother gets plenty of rest during this difficult period.
- Do not worry about leaving a crying child for 10 minutes or so after 15 minutes of trying consolation.

### Mother’s diet

The breastfeeding mother’s diet has been a controversial issue, but some mothers have found that cutting out cow’s milk, eggs and spicy foods has helped their babies’ colic. A trial of avoiding these foods in the diet is worthwhile.

### Drug treatment

Drugs are not generally recommended, especially as some may sedate the baby. However, for severe problems your doctor can prescribe something to help. Infacol Wind Drops may be soothing. Fortunately the problem is not serious and soon gets better.