

# Caring for Your Colicky Baby



## Emergency Department

4480 Oak Street, Vancouver, BC V6H 3V4  
604-875-2345 • 1-888-300-3088

[www.bcchildrens.ca](http://www.bcchildrens.ca)

## Advice for Parents & Caregivers

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### What is colic?

**W**e think that your baby has been crying because he or she has colic. Babies normally cry for up to 2 hours a day. When a baby has colic, he or she will cry or scream for about 3 hours, often in the afternoon or evening. The cry is louder and more intense than usual. It may seem like your baby is in pain. The crying may start and stop suddenly. It is often unrelated to what is happening at that time. Your baby may just have been content and then suddenly starts screaming. Your baby may draw up its legs and pass gas. These periods of crying usually start at 2 to 3 weeks of age and are better by 3 to 4 months of age. About 8-40% of babies have colic.

We do not know what causes colic. It is not a sign of a disease. Babies are very hard to soothe when they are crying with colic. Caregivers may feel helpless and upset. We know that a colicky baby can cause a lot of stress within the family.

### What can you do to help?

- ▶ Feed your baby slowly and try to decrease the amount of air swallowed (try different nipples or bottles) and burp the baby frequently.
- ▶ Wait at least 2 hours between feeds. It takes 2 hours for the stomach to empty after a feed. If you feed the baby too often the baby's stomach may be overly full and this will be uncomfortable for the baby.
- ▶ If you are breastfeeding:
  - Think about your milk supply. If you don't think you have enough milk to feed the baby, discuss it with your doctor. Changing what you eat may

help. Dairy, eggs, wheat and nuts sometimes cause allergies. You can try eliminating these foods one at a time, for a week each to see if it makes a difference. If there is no difference, you can resume your regular diet. You may want to discuss this with your doctor first.

- ▶ Do not try medicines. Medicines do not help colicky babies. Some of them, including homeopathic medicines can cause harm and be dangerous for babies.
- ▶ Try:
  - wrapping your baby tightly in a light blanket.
  - Sitting in a rocking chair and rocking your baby gently while making a "shushing" noise.
  - Putting the baby beside a machine that hums like a clothes dryer.
  - Taking your baby for a car ride or going for a walk.
- ▶ If the loudness of the cry is upsetting for you, use ear plugs as you hold or rock the baby.
- ▶ Take a break. It is hard to look after a baby with colic. The screams can be exhausting. Ask someone you trust for help. If you are going to "lose it", put your baby in a crib on his back. Remove any loose blanket or pillows from the crib and leave the room for a few minutes.
- ▶ If you are afraid that you are going to hurt or shake your baby dial 0 and ask for Zenith 1234 (helpline for children) or BC Parents in Crisis 604-669-1616.

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## See your family doctor if:

- ▶ Your baby still seems to have colic after 4 months.
- ▶ Your baby is not gaining weight normally.

## Bring your baby back to the Emergency Department if:

- ▶ Your baby has fever, vomiting or diarrhea more than 2 times or has blood in the stool.
- ▶ Your baby does not want to feed for more than 1 feeding.
- ▶ Cries continuously for more than 3-4 hours without stopping.
- ▶ Your baby has a change in behavior (i.e. very sleepy or not as responsive as usual).

At BC Children's Hospital, you are an important member of your child's health care team. Please ask questions so you understand and can be part of decisions about your child's care and treatment.



If you have any questions, please call 604-875-2345 local 7261.

**It's good to ask!**