

Kids First

Infantile Colic

Of all the health challenges that seem to plague infants, colic is the one that causes the most upset.

Imagine for a moment feeding your munchkin, when all of a sudden she begins screaming at the top of her lungs—arms curling in, legs drawing up—with what seems to be agonizing pain. All the common remedies associated with “over-the-fence,” neighbourly and grand-motherly advice seem to be of no avail.

Colic tends to start sometime in infancy, around the first two weeks of life, and persists for a number of months. Most health textbooks mention that it usually happens in the evening hours. I haven’t found that to be the case. I find that it tends to occur at any time of the day and seems to have no rhyme nor reason.

Colic is characterized by constant crying, screaming, whining, pain in the stomach area and acute irritability. (Not “cute” irritability.) The spells of crying can last for hours. This leads to a condition called aerophagia—the swallowing of air. Aerophagia causes distention of the bowels which creates more pain, creating more crying, causing more air to be swallowed. It becomes a cycle.

Colic is also characterized by passing an exorbitant amount of gas. The stomach area is enlarged and bloated. The infant does not appear to be ill. She’s gaining weight and has a good appetite. However, if either of those is absent, then the incessant crying can be caused by a problem different from colic. In such cases, I would suggest you

consult your family health care provider for advice.

There have been many theories to explain what colic is and why it occurs. Some have blamed lactose intolerance, some felt it is caused by stress of the parents—which a baby can readily pick up on—stress of the baby, abnormal gall-bladder function, higher levels of intestinal hormones and so on. None of these seem to provide adequate answers.

It’s interesting to note that breastfed babies are rarely affected by colic whereas bottle fed babies have a much higher incidence. The answer here is that mom’s milk is specially designed for that baby—and no other. It’s the perfect food. It’s easily digested, leaves very little waste and research shows that breastfed babies have a higher IQ than their formula fed counterparts (see p 28).

In my experience dealing with thousands of children and babies, I found that often a vertebral subluxation in the spine affecting the way the nervous system controls bowel function is usually the cause of colic. Any chiropractor involved in seeing children will attest to this fact.

You must understand that the digestive system is essentially a long tube (see *alive* #221) and is made of muscle walls which are under the direct control of the nervous system. I find that a vertebral subluxation will reduce the amount of information flowing from the brain to the large intestine in the case of colic—thereby reducing the normal function and motility (move-

ment and function) of the large intestine. This causes food to “stick around” in the large intestine longer than it should and it tends to produce gas. This gas causes distention of the intestinal wall, causing pain and crying. The cry of the baby is really for help.

I have often been asked if there are any nutritional products parents can give their colicky baby to ease their discomfort. If the child is older, mom can try a little slippery elm powder and also test for lactose intolerance which may produce gas in the bowel.

The most important thing is to find out why your baby has colic. To treat only the pain will provide generally short term relief. I have always felt that this is a most important distinction.

Children who are affected by colic generally show a wonderful response in the hands of a chiropractor. Most often I see results within the first week of care, but the care must be directed at the correction of the subluxation which is at the root of the problem, not simply giving the child mere relief.

For those of you who have children affected by colic or know of a new mom who has a child so afflicted, I suggest you take your child to see a chiropractor right away. ■

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