Infant colic is characterised by episodes of inconsolable crying in a baby, for which no apparent reason can be found, usually occurring for more than three hours at a time, three days per week and for three weeks out of a month.

Having to deal with a baby that suffers from colic also takes a toll on the caregivers and family, as it can be emotionally distressing not to be able to find the reason for the crying or being able to console the baby and stop the crying.

Colic usually appears a few weeks after birth and carries on until the baby is about three to four months old and, in some instances, up to six months of age. Colic is not dangerous or harmful. Experts say colic has no long-term effects and a baby with colic will gain weight and feed normally.

It is important to exclude other reasons that may cause the baby’s discomfort before coming to the conclusion that a baby has colic. Obvious reasons for the baby’s discomfort could include hunger, being too hot or too cold, overtired or ill, or suffering from food sensitivities.

Symptoms

- Vigorous, furious crying, more intense than “normal” crying. The baby’s face will become red and flushed. Crying episodes occur at more or less the same time every day, generally during the late afternoon or evening.
- Increased muscle tone: fists may be clenched, abdominal muscles tensed, knees drawn up, and the back arched.
- Feeding and sleep may be irregular and interrupted with episodes of intense crying.
- Wind: during episodes of crying, the baby may pass wind.
- Difficult to soothe, no matter what the parents do.

Treatment

Some studies suggest that infants with colic may benefit from hypoallergenic formulas or a soy formula. However, further study is needed to confirm this suggestion.

Existing data show a small possible benefit from dimethicone drops in the treatment of colic. Antispasmodics, such as dicyclomine, are not recommended for colic owing to their unacceptable side-effect profile in infants under six months of age.

While the medical options for the treatment of colic appear to be few, there are many things a parent can try when dealing with a baby with colic:

- Smaller, more frequent feedings.
- Making sure the holes in the bottle teats are the right size; holes that are too small may cause swallowing of air during feeds.
- Holding the baby upright during feeds; this makes it less likely that air is swallowed.
- Avoiding tea, coffee, spicy foods and alcohol in breastfeeding mothers.
- Burping can help trapped wind escape. Sit the baby upright or hold the baby against your shoulder with the neck and head supported. Rub their back orummy until trapped air comes out.
- Swaddling a baby (wrapping it up firmly in a blanket) during a crying episode.
- Some babies respond well to just being held.
- Offering the baby a pacifier.
- A warm bath or gentle massage.
- Sometimes a background noise, such as that made by a washing machine or vacuum cleaner, helps settle babies down.
- Some people find that going for a walk with the pram helps settle the baby down, as might a drive in the car, or anything that keeps the baby in motion, such as a baby swing.

Most of all, the parents and caregivers need to be reassured that colic will eventually pass and that it is not harmful to their baby. Get someone to help, as taking care of a colicky baby can be extremely exhausting. Enlist the help of family and friends so that the mom can take a break when possible.

Bibliography