



Reflux, Gas and Colic GatorMD.com

Crying is a normal part of infantile development. It is how babies communicate that they need or want something. The average baby cries about 1-3 hours per day. If the total crying exceeds this amount, especially if it is between the ages of 3 weeks and 3 months, it is generally referred to as colic. If you feel your baby's crying is excessive, they should be evaluated by your physician to rule out any serious pathology.

Babies with colic, may seem to be totally miserable, but generally, they are healthy from all other standpoints. After a thorough examination is completed, the excessive crying is labeled as colic. Colic is becoming more common and modern medicine has generally ascribed this excess crying and fussiness to the gastrointestinal system, such as excess gas, milk sensitivity and reflux.

Your physician will be monitoring your baby's weight at each visit. If there has been abnormal weight gain, an evaluation is warranted and medical treatment may be initiated fairly quickly. If the weight gain has not been a problem, then there are many options available besides medications to help soothe a crying infant and decrease reflux and colic. It is important to note that nearly all infants have some degree of reflux as the sphincter muscle at the top of their stomach is weak at birth. It strengthens over time and nearly all reflux resolves by 1 year of age, most much sooner than that. Therapy should be aimed at bridging the gap and alleviating symptoms as best as possible, while helping the body develop, and reach a balanced and natural state.

Parents who respond to cries more quickly, generally have babies that cry less frequently. You can't spoil a newborn. You may in fact make your life much easier if you respond quickly to a crying in the first 3 months of life. **Dr. Harvey Karp**, has an amazing DVD called, "The Happiest Baby" (happiestbaby.com) which every new parent should watch (you may be able to find the videos on youtube). He states that if your baby is crying, you should first ensure that they are not in pain, need to be fed or require a diaper change. Following this, you should try one of the five S's, Swaddling, Side or Stomach position (not for sleeping), Sucking, Swinging, and Shushing.

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Shushing can be particularly helpful. You can purchase a “Shusher” or make the noise yourself. Some have found luck running the vacuum as white noise near the child. There is also a great youtube video where Priscilla Dunstín describes on Oprah the different kinds of cries you may here from a baby. This may be helpful to parents in discerning what specific cries mean and allow you to respond more appropriate to your baby’s needs. (www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgkZf6jVdVg).

The Healing Tree

Branch #1 – Reflux precautions

The first and easiest step to take when concerned about reflux or colic is what has been termed “reflux precautions”. Nurse in a more upright position. Often, reflux is the result of an infant drinking too much milk, too fast, and using the upright position takes advantage of gravity.

Avoid putting your child down immediately after eating. Keep your baby upright for 20 to 30 minutes after each feeding if possible. Consider allowing the baby to sleep at a slight angle. Some find the car seat helpful. Some place large books under the legs of the crib at the head of the bed. Others put a blanket or towel underneath the mattress at the head of the bed to give the mattress a slight angle, which allows gravity to do its work.

If you’re breastfeeding and have a forceful let down, make sure to nurse in positions that allow your baby to have better control of how much milk they’re getting. The strong let down may lead to a large gush of foremilk. Your baby may reach satiety before they get to the more calorie dense hindmilk which could effect weight gain. Foremilk has a higher sugar content and if you have an increased proportion of foremilk in the gut, it can lead to increased gassiness in the infant. Some mothers find it helpful to feed on one breast only per feed. If you have breast pain because you are only feeding from one breast, consider pumping from the other breast and then switching which breast you use to feed 2-3 hours later. Please discuss this with your physician, especially if weight gain has not been optimal as there may be better options for you to try.

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Consider a **lactation consult** to find the optimal feeding positions for your baby. Even if you have had a lactation consult in the hospital before discharge, working with an experienced professional, in a 1 on 1 setting, now that your child is a little older, can be invaluable. We want to explore every possible behavioral concern before moving to any treatment regimen.

If bottle-feeding, check the bottle's nipple size. A smaller nipple will make your baby gulp air while eating and a larger nipple will speed up the flow of milk.

Branch #2 – Baby-Wearing.

For me, this one is a no-brainer. Babies love to be worn and held. Choosing a carrier that allows your child to be more upright with no pressure on the belly is ideal. The Ergo, Baby K'tan and the Moby are all great options.

Branch #3 – Milk Sensitivity

Breastfeeding mothers should keep a close eye on their diet to help avoid acid reflux in babies. Consider removing dairy from your diet, as the protein found in dairy products can irritate a baby's immature digestive tract. Often it can take 1-2 weeks to notice a significant difference in fussiness after removing dairy.

If that does not help, you can try to avoid other common allergens including wheat/gluten, fruits, nuts, eggs, shellfish and soy. Limit high-fat, fried or spicy foods, as well as carbonated drinks, chocolate and caffeine. Keep away from alcohol and cigarette smoke. If you feel this is too limiting, you can also try an elimination diet. Remove one food at a time for at least a week and see if you notice any change.

If formula fed, your baby may have a sensitivity to milk proteins. Consider switching to another formula. Some try soy formula first (though there is often a similar reaction to soy and milk proteins). Others switch to formula with proteins that are somewhat broken down such as Gentlease or an extensively hydrolyzed formula such as Nutramigen.

Branch #4- Thickened feeds

Thickened feeds may also be effective for babies, especially those who spit up a lot.

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Consider adding a small amount of baby cereal to milk. Discuss this option with your child's doctor first. There is conflicting evidence about whether this practice is effective. Some research shows that thickened feeds increased the weight of the milk and help gravity do its work leading to less reflux. Other scientific studies conclude that a newborn gut is not ready for food and the starch will cause increased gas.

Branch #5 - Probiotics

Some cases of infant reflux may be due to an overpopulation of bad bacteria. Lactobacillus Reuteri has been shown to improve colic in several research studies. Adding in good bacteria in the form of probiotics will help to overrun the bad bacteria. Find a probiotic that is made especially for infants, such as Gerber-Soothe or BioGaia. Powdered probiotics can be given in a spoon with only a few drops of water, or can be added to pumped breast milk and given in a bottle. You can even apply the probiotics to your nipple and allow your baby to swallow it while breastfeeding.

Branch #6 - Exercise

To help babies deal with the symptoms of acid reflux, you can try some basic movement exercises, which will help improve digestion. You should try to avoid the exercises right after a meal. Exercises that target gas and bloating, such as bicycle pedaling movements, are a great place to start. Put your baby in a lying position. Hold the legs in a half-bent position with your hands. Gently begin to move your baby's legs as if he or she was riding a bicycle. Do it for 2-3 minutes, several times a day.

Branch #7 - Massage Therapy

Regular massage helps improve functioning of the respiratory and digestive systems in babies. Massage stimulates the vagus nerve, the nerve in the brain that controls various regions of the respiratory and digestive systems. Massage helps with reflux, reduces crying and aids sleeping. Put your baby in a lying position. Apply some warm olive oil, coconut oil, or coconut butter (or any mild lotion) on your baby's stomach. Gently massage the stomach in a clockwise direction for 3-5 minutes.

Castor oil has amazing detoxifying abilities, and can help flush the body of whatever is causing a problem. Castor oil can be rubbed on baby's belly several times a day. When applying anything to the skin, start with a small area to see if your child is sensitive.

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Branch #8 - Music Therapy

Research has shown that music is useful in treating colic. When your baby is quiet and calm, play their favorite music. Pay extra attention and give extra affection at this time. When the infant begins crying, stop the music. This procedure was followed throughout the day in studies and within a few days, crying and colic decreased significantly.

Branch #9 - Gripe Water

Gripe water is a common home remedy for colic. The main ingredient is usually dill and it often contains fennel as well. You can make your own at home by steeping these ingredients and creating a tea. Once it cools, you can give a $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon, several times a day. You can easily find some at any grocery store if this is more convenient.

Branch #10 - Tea/Herbs

A) Chamomile

This is an excellent natural remedy for infant acid reflux. Its antispasmodic and sedative properties help improve digestion, relieve colic pain and induce relaxation. Put $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of dried chamomile flowers in a cup of hot water. Cover and steep for 5 to 10 minutes. Strain and allow it to cool down. Give your baby the weak tea in $\frac{1}{4}$ -1 teaspoon doses throughout the day.

B) Fennel

If your baby's stomach aches due to acid reflux, indigestion or gas, fennel is a good home remedy. Both babies and nursing mothers can benefit from fennel. Add 1 teaspoon of crushed fennel seeds to 1 cup of hot water. Steep for 10 minutes, then strain it. Give your baby $\frac{1}{4}$ to 1 teaspoon of this herbal tea throughout the day.

C) Cumin

Cumin is another good natural remedy for treating reflux in babies. The seeds stimulate digestion and reduce digestive issues, such as acidity and gas. Boil 1 teaspoon of cumin seeds in 1 cup of water. Cover and allow it to steep for 5 to 10 minutes. Strain and allow it to cool. Give your baby $\frac{1}{4}$ to 1 teaspoon of this solution a few times daily.

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You can combine these ingredients into a tea mixture for better results. Tea can be given every 3-5 hours as needed.

Branch #11 – Traditional Chinese Medicine

Tummy Tamer, by Kan Herbs is a wonderful blend of herbs that can be very helpful at re-establishing balance in the digestive track. It contains licorice, fennel and a specialized blend of herbs. This requires a prescription so please speak to your medical provider if this is something that is of interest to your family and in line with your beliefs.

Branch #12 – Simethicone Drops

Simethicone gas drops can be given with feeds. They decrease the surface tension of gas bubbles so they can pass more easily through the intestines.

Branch #13 – Chiropractic Care/osteopathic manipulation

Chiropractic or osteopathic manipulation is another method that has been reported to reduce colic. Success rates are mixed and injuries have been documented, so please discuss this option with your provider if it is in line with your family beliefs.

Branch #14 – Homeopathy.

The most common homeopathic remedies for colic used are Chamomilla and Colocynth. There are no published scientific control trials showing evidence of efficacy of these treatments though there is anecdotal evidence of their benefit in some people. Boiron makes excellent homeopathic products if this is something that is in line with your family's beliefs.

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