

Colic and Breastfeeding

An information leaflet from the Breastfeeding Walk-in Clinic, Mater Dei Hospital. Phone: 25454445

A number of babies go through crying episodes which can last from a number of minutes to over three hours. These episodes tend to start around two weeks of age and continue until three months. At six or eight weeks there is a peak of these crying periods and often they occur in the late afternoon and evening. Many babies have these symptoms which is referred to as colic, although the cause is not really fully understood or easily solved.

Symptoms of Colic Include:

- Long inconsolable and crying periods
- Frowning and grimacing
- Drawing legs up to the abdomen
- Stiffening the body as if in pain
- Passing of wind or stools (often after which the baby settles)
- Is a peaceful, happy baby in-between

Cluster feeding should not be mistaken for colic. It is very common for breastfeeding babies to have certain times of the day when there are very short spaces between feeds. Mostly this occurs during the evening and is often followed by a longer sleep period. If the baby is settled for most of the day and does not show symptoms of colic this is normal behavior. Although colic is less common in breastfed babies several situations have been associated as a cause.

Foremilk Breastfeeds

Human milk changes during a feed. Initially milk is higher in sugar but as a feed continues the fat content increases so that by the end of the feed most of the calories are from fat. Switching breasts during feeds before the baby has stimulated the fatty hind milk to be made (can take fifteen to twenty minutes) will result in the

baby drinking a larger volume of milk sugar and generally leads the baby to drink a larger volume of milk to compensate for having a 'low calorie' meal. Ideally you should allow your baby to breastfeed on one breast until he/she drops the breast unprompted. At this point you can offer the second breast, he may want it or he may not. The breast is able to adjust to producing milk at these intervals so if your baby feeds every three hours the breast will not become engorged by a six hour break. High milk sugar feeds may also be caused by poor positioning at the breast. Having a breastfeed assessed can determine if this is contributing to your baby's colic.

Fast Milk Flow

If you have a good milk supply which flows fast the baby may suffer from colic because of trying to deal with this. Often the flow causes this baby to cough or choke or may lead to him coming off the breast frequently.

Management

- Have a breastfeeding assessed. Better positioning may regulate the flow.
- Feed from only one breast
- Express the foremilk 10-20cc prior to feeding.
- Breastfeed lying down or with the baby in an upright position.
- Breastfeed the baby before he wakes up crying. If he is very hungry he will suck vigorously and cause the milk to let down very fast.
- If all these fail to improve your baby's colic, a nipple shield may help.

Food sensitivities

Rarely a baby may be sensitive to foods in the mother's diet which cause the baby to suffer from colic. There is no list of foods to avoid different babies react to different foods, most react to no foods. Ideally you should eat whatever you like but vary your diet. A reaction to a food in the baby appears four to twelve hours after eating. If the baby is frequently colicky this could be related to foods taken often such as cow's milk or caffeine.

Management

- Keep a food diary and eliminate suspect foods.

- Eliminate caffeine and cow's milk from your diet for one week. To eliminate cow's milk you must not take milk, cheese, yoghurt, ice-cream and any foods that contain milk.
- Calcium can be obtained from other sources such as sesame seeds, nuts, sardines, salmon, green leafy vegetables, peas, baked beans and oranges.
- If after one week there is no changes in the baby reintroduce milk products.
- If the colic improves for three to four weeks completely avoid the offending food after which you may be able to take a little occasionally.

Soothing a colicky baby

- Respond to your baby. Your baby is unhappy and needs your comforting touch.
- Hold your baby with his/her tummy against you, face down either on your chest, knees or along your arm.
- Wear your baby in a sling. Many fussy babies are soothed in a sling leaving your hands free to do small tasks.
- Swaddle or wrap your baby well.
- Go out for a walk, movement may be soothing. If your baby becomes unsettled at a particular time of day go out just before the start.
- Go for a drive, the vibration of a car engine often works wonders.
- Reduce stimulation, dim lights and try to reduce loud noise.
- Have a baby break. Use expressed breast milk to be able to have some time to yourself. Let dad take over whilst you nap, sleep early, have a relaxing bath etc. It is extremely tiring listening to constant crying, forgive yourself for feeling negative at times, things do get better.
- There are colic preparations available in pharmacies which help some babies.
- Consult with your Pediatrics or G.P. for any medication concerns.