

Does your infant have a regular fussy period each day when it seems you can do nothing to comfort them? This is quite common, particularly between 6:00 p.m. and midnight—just when you, too, are feeling tired from the day's events. These periods of crankiness may feel like torture, but fortunately, they don't last long. The length of this fussing usually peaks at about 3 hours a day by 6 weeks old, and then declines to 1-2 hours a day by 3-4 months old. As long as the baby calms within a few hours and is relatively peaceful the rest of the day, there's no reason for alarm.

If the crying does not stop- but intensifies and persists throughout the day or night, it may be caused by colic. About one in five babies develop colic, usually between 2-4 weeks old. They cry inconsolably, often screaming, extending, or pulling up their legs, and passing gas. Their stomachs may be enlarged or distended with gas. The crying spells can occur around the clock, but they often become worse in early evening. Unfortunately, there is no definite explanation for why this happens. Most often, colic means simply that the child is unusually sensitive to stimulation or cannot "self-console" or regulate his nervous system. As they mature, this inability to self-console—marked by constant crying—will improve.

Generally, this "colicky crying" will stop by 3-4 months, but it can last until 6 months of age. Sometimes, in breastfeeding babies, colic is a sign of sensitivity to a food in the mother's diet. Rarely, the discomfort is caused by a sensitivity to milk protein in formula. Colicky behavior may also signal a medical problem, such as a hernia or some type of illness. Although you may simply have to wait it out, try these tips:

- If you're nursing, you can try to eliminate milk products & caffeine from your diet. Avoiding spicy or gassy foods like onions or cabbage has worked for some moms, but has not been scientifically proven.
- If you're feeding formula to your baby, talk with us about a protein hydrolysate formula. If food sensitivity is causing the discomfort, the colic should decrease within a few days of these changes.
- Keep a diary of when your baby is awake, asleep, eating, and crying. Write down how long it takes your baby to eat or if your baby cries the most after eating. Talk with us about these behaviors to see if her crying is related to sleeping or eating.
- Do not overfeed your baby, which could cause discomfort. In general, try to wait at least 2-2.5 hours from the start of one feeding to the start of the next one.
- Rock your baby, run the vacuum in the next room, or place them where they can hear the clothes dryer, a fan or a white- noise machine. Steady rhythmic motion and a calming sound may help them fall asleep. However, be sure to never place your child on top of the washer/dryer.
- Introduce a pacifier. While some babies will actively refuse it, it will provide instant relief for others.
- Lay your baby tummy-down across your knees and gently rub their back. The pressure against their belly may be comforting.
- When you're feeling tense and anxious, have a family member or a friend look after the baby—and get out of the house. Even an hour or two away will help you maintain a positive attitude. No matter how impatient or angry you become, a baby should never be shaken. Shaking an infant hard can cause blindness, brain damage, or even death. Let your own doctor know if you are depressed or are having trouble dealing with your emotions, as she can recommend ways to help.