

# THE BABY COLIC CHALLENGE

by

'The Baby Colic Coach' Venetia Moore

Ideally, having a baby is a joyous experience – but it can also be a very challenging one, especially if your baby has colic. No one can prepare you for the challenges and the impact colic can have on you, your partner and family. Colicky babies tend to cry a lot more than others; those peaceful rest times just don't seem to come often enough. My intention with this article is to help you to identify whether your baby could be suffering from a degree of baby colic, offer you some insight into what your baby may be experiencing, and suggest some ways in which you may be able to help.

Right now you may be feeling exhausted, disappointed, helpless, disillusioned, worried you're not parenting right, or just plain desperate. If so, you're not alone. Evidence shows that between 5 – 25% of newborns could show signs of infantile colic\*, so there are many parents feeling just the way you do!

It's important to remember that, as a parent (even first time around), you possess an innate knowing about when things are 'not OK' with your little one. All babies cry on and off and, as your confidence grows, you'll become better able to interpret your baby's different cries and to grasp what your little one is shouting about. However, this isn't always easy, especially with the first baby; it can seem as though you're learning a whole new language and, until you can achieve that, you have to guess what their needs might be, day and night. Until you get into a natural rhythm with your baby, it's normal to feel an array of different thoughts and feelings, including feeling that you're being a rotten mum or dad! You need to be gentle and kind with yourself during this challenging time.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

It's possible that you've been receiving conflicting advice and information from various sources about how to deal with a colicky baby. You may also have heard lots of theories about what colic really is and whether or not your baby has it.

Colic affects the stomach and the small and large intestines, causing abdominal pain and discomfort, spasms, inflammation and bloating. It can feel like having a 'stitch'. Discomfort from the pain can radiate through the whole body, especially around the lower back area. The symptoms can vary: see if any of these in the following list might apply to your baby.

Is your baby...

Being generally restless and fretful, and not a happy baby

Crying frequently and inconsolably, or screaming, with sudden ear-piercing shrieks

Showing whole body tension  
Drawing the knees up towards the tummy  
Frequently arching the back  
Bloated around the abdominal area most of the time  
Frequently passing wind or straining (often accompanied by a reddened face)  
Not able to establish a good feeding pattern  
Clenching the fists  
Sleeping poorly  
Showing Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde personality swings...?

#### FOOD INTOLERANCES WHEN BREAST FEEDING

Could what you're eating be affecting your baby's tummy?

Each baby reacts differently to certain foods that the mother has eaten. If your baby is particularly disturbed one day, try to remember what you have eaten in the past twenty-four hours. What you eat could be affecting the taste and amount of milk you're producing, and creating intestinal gas in your baby. If a particular food seems suspect, remove it from your diet for a while and see how your baby responds.

#### REFLUX

Excessive hiccups resulting in milk being brought up after a feed (or at other times) is known as reflux, which can sometimes be confused with colic. If your baby is spitting up a lot it could be a sign of reflux, which occurs when stomach acid regurgitates into the oesophagus, causing irritation and pain – it's a bit like heart-burn. Reflux can be a less obvious cause of apparently colicky symptoms or waking during the night.

#### THE VAGUS NERVE

The vagus nerve starts at the brain stem and travels through the neck into the chest and then into the abdomen. Emotions and state of mind are closely linked to the digestive system and this connection is largely due to the vagus nerve. Your baby's emotional wellbeing can affect their digestive system, so calming and comforting techniques do more than just soothe your baby – they also help to settle the tummy.

#### BIRTH STRESS

Some stress is good – at the beginning of labour it actually helps to stimulate the creation of massive numbers of neurons in the brain, so your baby's brain is primed for new learning once it is born. If, however, there's a difficult birth or post-birth trauma, stress hormones could

continue to stay high after the birth, which could affect your baby adversely. It may lead to your baby's withdrawing into long periods of sleep, or being unsettled, irritable and colicky.

### SOME SOOTHING SUGGESTIONS

It's important to remember that baby colic is self-limiting; the symptoms usually begin to subside at around the age of four to six months as the digestive system matures and begins to work more efficiently. The good thing is that there are many ways to help your baby and yourself. As long as you have checked with a GP or health visitor that there isn't a more serious underlying problem, then your baby can only benefit from the following gentle soothing suggestions.

**A warm bath** – Being in warm water can be very soothing, and the warmth can help to relax tight muscles and reduce pain. Why not follow a bath with a soothing massage, some gentle baby yoga movements or just a long loving cuddle?

**Baby massage** – Loving touch is a universal way of expressing love. It helps us to feel nurtured and nourished in our lives; in addition to helping us to feel better, it can promote healing. Touch is a baby's most powerful sense, so massage is like food for them – they need it! Try doing some gentle massage to the tummy (preferably in a clockwise direction); gentle strokes on the back and feet are lovely too. Why not see if you can join a baby massage class or find a trained baby massage instructor to help you?

**Nappy-free time** – Without the restrictions of a nappy your baby can kick and move more freely. This enables them to stretch out tight muscles and allows any trapped wind to move through the colon more freely.

**Baby yoga** – Small gentle movements can help trapped, painful wind to move through the colon and encourage tight and painful muscles to relax. Baby yoga movements may be accompanied by simple songs (Row, Row, Row Your Boat is a favourite!) and can really help to distract and uplift your troubled baby.

If you're going through such a demanding time, take heart – it really won't last for ever. Meanwhile, be kind to yourself and to those around you, as they too will be feeling the strain. And please don't feel you have to soldier on alone: be willing to ask for and accept help if you need it – whether from family, friends or health professionals. Get the help you so rightly deserve if you are one of those experiencing the Baby Colic Challenge!

\*(Kilgour T, Wade S. Infantile Colic. *Clinical Evidence* 2005)

### *About Venetia Moore, The Baby Colic Coach*

*Having experienced baby colic first-hand with her own children Venetia Moore understands the many ups and downs of it all. Her experiences steered her, 23 years ago, to become a complementary health therapist; she recently released a book called Surviving Baby Colic available from Amazon. Feeling strongly that parents need empowering information and support to help at this time, she now also provide an online service to do just that.*

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