

# Colic - Is it really just a fussy baby?

By Kristi Wees

Oh, what is a parent to do? Your bouncing baby is miserable and cries all the time. Nothing seems to work to soothe the little bundle. This isn't anything like what you thought parenthood would be like! Then during a well check the pediatrician utters the words... "Maybe it is COLIC."

Uhhhhm, what did you say? In 1954 the criterion that was used to tell a parent their child had colic was known as the Wessel criteria and was "diagnosed" if the baby was crying and fussing more than:

- 3 hours per day.
- 3 days a week.
- 3 weeks.

Well, to say we have come a long way from those days may be an understatement - or is it?

When my own daughter's hours of crying were dismissed as "colic", I set out to figure out just what this mysterious diagnosis meant. I met a doctor, Dr. Bryan Vartabedian, who had written a book called, "*Colic Solved*" (2007, Ballantine Books). Dr. V, as he is

affectionately known by his patients, is a well known pediatric gastroenterologist at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, TX. In this book, Dr. V introduces the



idea that in a colicky baby, "something physical may be in fact wrong" causing a baby to cry so much. With estimates of one in five babies having unexplained irritability, you can imagine that Dr. V's advice is invaluable to sleep-deprived parents.

Dr. V paints a clear case on why a baby can't have colic as a diagnosis and quickly introduces the idea that reflux or gastroesophageal reflux (GERD) may be an underlying cause. He provides a Reflux 101 chapter with a great mini anatomy lesson in GERD, including explanations of motility and LES (the lower esophageal sphincter: a "valve" of sorts right before the stomach).

He provides a wonderful list called "7 signs of reflux in your baby." After checking the list, I had an *a-ha* moment when I realized my child had six of the seven signs!! It was this list that I took to our pediatrician appointment, armed and ready to advocate for my little screaming baby.

"Unexplained screaming and colicky behavior may once have been passed off as a speed bump of infancy, but we now know that it may be an indicator of underlying problems." - Dr. Vartabedian, *Colic Solved*

Dr. V does not stop with just GERD, but discusses the "other colic": milk protein allergy. Dr. V describes the

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symptoms, testing and possible solutions for milk protein allergy, as well as the "why" behind it all. He promotes breast milk as best for a fussy baby, with modifications to mom's diet if a milk allergy is at play.

One chapter offers practical advice for things a parent can try, from positioning, to burping, to rice cereal recommendations. The illustrations in this chapter go a long way to describing what may be going on inside your baby's tummy. Reflux medications are also described in great detail, but only as a last resort after all other more natural solutions have been evaluated.

So for all the sleep-deprived parents out there whose pediatrician (or mother-in-law or great aunt) has told you your baby has COLIC, I encourage you to do a little research and find out what else might be going on with your little bundle (who is supposed to be filled with JOY)... because there are things you can actually DO to help your child become a happier baby on the block! ■

*Kristi Wees is a pediatric patient advocate who lives and works in Gibsonia. She can be reached at kristi@EmpoweredAdvocacy.com*

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