

# **The Cause and Treatment of Infant, Newborn and Baby Gas Problems**

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All babies have gas, some babies simply have more than others. Furthermore, some babies have an easier time passing gas, which may stem from a learned or innate ability. Gassiness in the newborn and many babies often results from multiple factors, not just one simple thing.

## **Where does gas come from in infants and newborns?**

There are different ways that air can get into babies' digestive systems. Gas is produced in the digestive tract from the moment baby has his or her first drink of breast milk or formula. Newborn gas is a natural byproduct of digesting lactose, proteins and other nutrients contained in breast milk or formula.

In addition, some pediatricians and lactation specialists assert that traces of gas-producing foods, such as cruciferous vegetables and legumes, can be passed from mother to baby. Some experts also warn against excessive acidity in the maternal diet. Citrus fruits and juices, strawberries and tomatoes are high in acidity and may irritate the infant. Dairy products in mother's diet can also lead to "intolerances" in baby. The problem is usually linked to the milk protein found in milk, cheese, butter, yogurt, ice cream, etc. Soy and peanut intolerance in babies often accompanies dairy intolerance. When breastfeeding, a mother can test how these common culprits may be affecting her child by religiously eliminating all dairy, soy and peanut products from her own diet for two weeks. Reintroduction of soy first, then a cooked milk product (such as hard cheese or yogurt) should be done very slowly to monitor baby's tolerances.

Air bubbles can also be taken in through baby's mouth. Most commonly, it is a result of the suction created during nursing. For this reason, it is important to burp every 3 to 5 minutes during feedings or between breasts. If your baby is bottle-fed, make certain that the bottle's nipple is the right size. If the nipple is too big, it will cause your baby to eat too fast. If it's too small, it will cause your baby to gulp air.

Another possible reason for infant gassiness is hyper-lactation syndrome. When a mother has a very abundant milk supply, she may produce a larger amount of foremilk. Foremilk is higher in water content, higher in lactose and usually delivered with greater force during letdown. In excess, foremilk can make baby's stomach cramp, creating more fussiness. A baby that gulps the quickly flowing milk also tends to take in more air, thereby getting gassier. Because the baby may not be getting enough of the rich hind milk, he or she tends to want to eat more often, which perpetuates the problem. The baby that suffers from hyper-lactation syndrome is characterized by higher than normal weight gain, increased gassiness, and fussiness.

Over stimulation can also lead to increased gassiness. Just as many adults experience intestinal disturbances in stressful situations, so are babies affected by their environments. Sensitive infants that are bombarded with noise, lights, touch and multiple experiences will usually “shut down” in an attempt to reduce stimulation. This shut down response does not completely insulate baby from the effects of the stimulation. Babies that are easily overloaded often experience more severe gas, fussiness, and difficulty sleeping later in the day or night. In general, the more activity (errands, visitors, T.V., phones, etc.) in baby’s day, the higher the chances of gassiness and fussiness in baby’s evening and night.

A certain amount of crying is normal in all infants, since it is their only means of verbal communication. Babies’ crying may indicate that they are hungry, lonely, warm, cold, uncomfortable or in need of a diaper change. Many babies go through periods of crying for no apparent reason, as they simply get used to the new world. Crying in general causes babies to gulp air into their digestive systems. These air bubbles can get trapped in their stomach and/or passed on to the intestine. Gas pain can also be a direct result of air swallowed during crying.

## **Why does infant gas cause pains and discomfort?**

Normally, gas is not a problem and causes no pain or discomfort because it is quickly and easily pushed through the digestive system. However, babies are born with a very immature gut. Most experts agree that for the first thirteen weeks of life outside the womb, the newborn digestive system is literally just learning to function. Muscles that support digestion have not developed the proper rhythm for moving food efficiently through the digestive tract. Furthermore, newborns lack the benevolent bacterial flora (probiotics) that develop over time to aid digestion.

Gas has buoyancy and gas pockets can become trapped in the upper and lower intestines. The gas acts like a cork, impeding or halting the flow of gastric juices and built-up pressure causes painful bloating and swelling of the abdomen. Baby’s immature digestive system is unable to cope effectively. When gas pockets form in the stomach, this can cause the stomach to distend but is also the main cause of hiccups.

## **What treatment is available for baby’s gas problems?**

Burping the baby thoroughly will reduce the amount of air in the stomach, so that it does not pass on to the intestinal tract. Unfortunately, burping is not 100% effective at eliminating gas, since it has absolutely no effect on the gas created in the intestines during normal digestion. There are baby massage techniques which may prove effective in helping baby to release gas. Simply applying light pressure on the tummy can soothe and help. You can also try carrying baby in the “football hold” – face down on your forearm with baby’s legs straddling your elbow and baby’s chin resting in your hand. Again, the gentle pressure placed on the little tummy can help soothe and release baby’s gas. Massaging baby’s tummy in a clockwise motion or straight down from ribs down to

pelvis can also help move gas along the intestinal track. Doing leg exercises at each diaper change can also help- very gently press baby's knees into the stomach and then gently straighten the legs, follow with some bicycle movements of the legs. Repeat this for 3-5 minutes at each diaper change. Putting baby on his tummy while he is awake can also help relieve some gas.

There are several treatments available for infant gas. As always, you should consult your pediatrician first before giving baby any medications, remedies or supplements.

## **Conclusion**

Approaching the problem of infant gas and fussiness as a multi-level problem is usually most effective. If the signs of hyper-lactation seem familiar, then contact a lactation specialist to help correct the problem. Avoiding the foods mentioned above for at least a few days may help indicate how much of a problem they cause baby. If gassiness and fussiness is excessive around the clock, a two-week trial elimination of dairy, soy and peanuts will show if mother's diet is a contributing factor.

Recognizing the sensitive and over-stimulated baby is often the most difficult for parents. Keeping outings and visitors to a minimum for a few weeks may decrease the degree of gassiness and fussiness. Allowing the infant to have quiet and uninterrupted sleep helps prevent overtiredness, increased irritability and unnecessary crying episodes.

Remember that babies are just getting accustomed to this world. As they grow older, most will become far less gassy and fussy. Their digestive tracts will learn how to function well. In the first three months of life, babies are not well-equipped to calm themselves. Self-calming is a skill that develops slowly over time and at different rates in children.