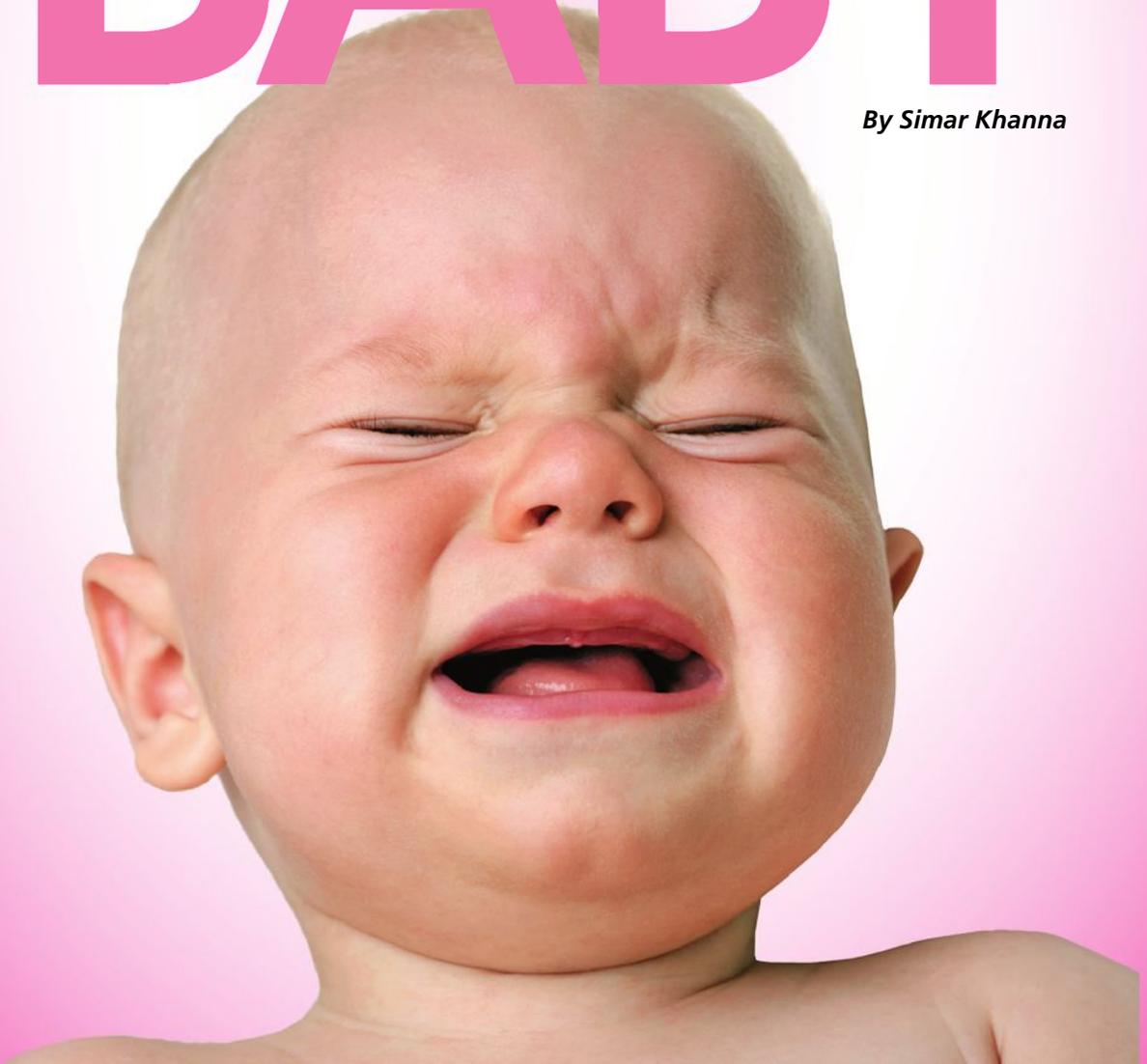


WAR CRY OF THE
FUSSY
BABY

By Simar Khanna



Understanding colic and learning how to cope

Like most expectant mothers, Elana Vitek had visions of her baby, sweet images of a calm and cuddly newborn. Instead, her baby cried. Loudly. No, she screamed. She screamed nonstop, Vitek said, for 10 to 12 hours a day and napped only 20 minutes at a time, once or twice a day.

Vitek tried swaddling, breastfeeding, driving for hours in the middle of the night with her baby daughter, Sophia, in the back seat. But for four straight months Sophia suffered from extreme colic and was, for the most part, inconsolable.

“It shattered our dreams in the beginning of having a calm baby,” says Vitek, a marriage and family therapist who lives in Alameda. “I had a lot of ideas of how it was going to be. But it was incredibly difficult, very isolating.”

Feelings of isolation are common among parents of colicky newborns because most are exhausted from lack of rest, desperate to cease the crying and at a loss for solutions. Yet, they are not alone.

One in five babies suffer from colic, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. Though most babies cry, colic is defined by the three 3s: The baby, who is otherwise healthy, cries for at least three hours a day, at least three days a week for three or more weeks.

To make matters worse, AAP acknowledges there is little known about what causes colic and how to treat it. Most theories about the cause revolve around digestive issues, suggesting the baby’s gut is immature and sensitive to breast milk and formula. And, suddenly, when the baby is about 4 months old, the problem disappears.

But one thing is certain. “It can be profoundly disturbing to a family,” says Dr. Michael Cabana, director of general pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco.

Cabana is the lead investigator for UCSF’s Probiotics and Crying Kids Study, whose purpose is to determine if probiotics make a difference in baby fussiness. (Probiotics are live microorganisms, in most cases bacteria, that are similar to beneficial microorganisms found in the human gut.)

Cabana said the UCSF study is hoping to replicate one done in Italy, in which adding harmless bacteria, similar to that found in yogurt, to a baby’s diet, significantly reduced crying among babies.

“It seems bacteria in the gut might be associated with having colic,” Cabana says.

The national, blinded study will compare the effects of formula containing probiotics versus a standard infant formula. Nationwide, the study will follow 138 babies, and 25 of those will be monitored by UCSF. So far, four babies have participated at UCSF, according to research coordinator Sara Hawkey.

The hospital is actively recruiting participants; infants must be between the age of 3 weeks and 4 months and meet the definition of colicky. To be

included, a participant has to experience crying for at least three hours per day, three days per week for at least one week prior to enrolling. Babies who are exclusively breastfed are not eligible. (During the study they are limited to one breastfeeding per day.) Participating families will receive a month’s worth of formula. They won’t know if it contains probiotics or not. Parents will be asked to keep a diary of the baby’s crying and sleeping patterns. Researchers will visit the baby on day 14 and day 28 to collect data.

The Bay Area, Cabana said, is a great place to conduct the study because it is so diverse. Having a varied group of participants will give researchers a chance to see if ethnic background, something in the environment, genetics



Dr. Michael Cabana, director of general pediatrics at UCSF.

Try the Five S’s

If you think your baby cries excessively, talk with your pediatrician and rule out any medical problems. If it turns out your baby is colicky, the following steps, called the Five S’s, are widely recommended to try and calm the baby. Try one at a time, and remember to be patient.

1. **Swaddle.** Wrap the baby in a blanket.
2. **Lay the baby on his side or on his tummy** while holding him against you so a little pressure is applied to his tummy.
3. **Make shushing sounds.**
4. **Swing.** Rhythmic motion often helps.
5. **Suck.** Give the baby a pacifier.

or a host of other things effect colic. The study will run until the desired number of babies has participated. It will take about a year to analyze the data, Cabana said.

“Parents who participate are really doing everyone a wonderful service,” said Cabana. “In all likelihood, there is no immediate benefit in participating in study; there’s a 50 percent chance you’ll get a placebo. But these studies will be helpful to kids in the future.”

That’s little comfort, however, to parents who are at their wit’s end now, the way Vitek was with Sophia seven years ago.

“I was researching and researching and coming up empty,” she says. And, with no family around for support, she and her husband just coped as best they could. “I decided once I recovered from this I was going to start a group. The only time I could find comfort was when I was with another mother who was going through this.”

Vitek has followed through with her pledge. She recently launched the Colic Support Group (colicsupportgroup.com) and is trying to reach out to parents.

“My main goal is getting support (for moms),” she said. “There are tons of things on the Internet that you can try, but no in-person support where you can sit with another parent. It’s like an instant bond, a connection. It makes you feel better that someone else is going through the same thing, and, ‘Wow, I’m not crazy.’”

Having a support system is probably the best thing parents of colicky babies can do for themselves, according to Sally Twesten, a health education manager with the Palo Alto Medical Foundation who has been advising parents for 10 years. She said colicky babies are usually at their worst between 6 p.m. and midnight, just when Mom’s losing steam and Dad’s coming home from work.

“Let people help you,” Twesten says. “It’s nice to have a break. Take turns with the baby. If Dad hasn’t been there all day and he has more patience, let him put baby in car seat and go for a drive and give Mom a break. It’s a perfect time to have a neighbor or in-law take a turn with the baby.”

The Palo Alto Medical Foundation offers many free classes throughout the South Bay, and colic is covered in



ELANA VITEK

Jan and Elana Vitek suffered through months of colic with their older daughter, Sophia.

prenatal and lactation courses. The foundation also provides books, videos and other resources for new parents. Most importantly, the classes and other programs the foundation sponsors give new mothers a chance to meet each other and share experiences.

“One big thing to keep in mind is that it is not a sign of any lack of parenting skills. You just have a baby that’s colicky,” Twesten says. “Crying doesn’t really hurt the baby. It’s harder on you than it is on the baby. Don’t get upset. Stay calm. Do not start shaking the baby.”

Colicky babies usually grow out of it around 4 months of age, so Twesten’s advice to parents is to just wait it out. Eventually, she says, the crying will stop. ■

Simar Khanna is an associate editor at *Bay Area Parent*.

Resources

- **Probiotics and Crying Kids Study:** For more information on the study, visit chipper.ucsf.edu. If you are interested in participating, call 866-913-8477 or email pack@ucsf.edu.
- **Colic Support Group:** colicsupportgroup.com. info@colicsupportgroup.com. 510-381-3030.
- **Palo Alto Medical Foundation Health Education:** pamf.org/healtheducation.