



What to do when Baby has Reflux

Signs, symptoms and solutions from Midwife Cath

Have you ever heard a baby with reflux? They cry and cry and cry and cry, and what's worse they cannot tell you what they are crying about! If you've ever had heartburn you would know the constant discomfort that babies with reflux feel.

These babies are uncomfortable, miserable and unhappy. They look like they're in bad pain and cannot be calmed. Reflux can be very distressing for parents too; they think the reason their baby is crying is due to hunger, pain or colic. Mothers often feel a lack of confidence that they're unable to master the basic skill of settling their own baby and tend to seek help from friends, family or lactation consultants as they believe it must be a breastfeeding issue such as attachment to the breast or not enough milk. Most commonly it's the dreaded reflux!

Most people have a theory on why the baby is crying. But what *is* reflux you ask? At the top of the stomach there is a sphincter that keeps food down when we swallow. The stomach has acid juices that are required to help break down the food to be digested. Some newborn babies have an immature sphincter and when some milk comes up, the acid in the stomach comes up too, causing burning and heartburn.

Common signs include baby being unable to lie on their back without crying, waking up crying, screaming suddenly and fussing, arching their back and moving their head at the breast or bottle. When they finally fall asleep and are placed in the cot, within five minutes they start crying again, inconsolable until fed and the process starts again. Another common sign is baby squishing their face up after a burp as if they've eaten something they don't like. This is the acid in their stomach refluxing up from the stomach. As you can imagine, it tastes awful.

"The worst thing was no one was listening to me" said a mum of three. Her third baby was diagnosed with bad reflux – and she felt relieved to have a word that described her baby, who was crying for hours on end.

Symptoms can start as early as two to three weeks after birth and can be diagnosed by your maternal and child health nurse, GP or pediatrician. At about week three, it's possible to diagnose if your baby has gastric reflux. At this time, I receive phone calls from women saying, "I can't stop my baby crying", "I can't settle my baby", and "he will not lie down on the floor or in the cot", "there is something wrong with my breast milk" or "he has such bad wind". They watch other babies on the ground

playing happily and mothers' breastfeeding with ease and it makes them feel sad and upset. Mothers of babies with reflux however, may find themselves walking around all day, holding their baby upright. This is so difficult for our new mums.

Often babies with reflux will also vomit. It's unlikely to be a large amount of vomit but it will be enough to make you feel concerned. Some babies don't vomit but will cough and others just cry. Babies with reflux seem generally unhappy; however, they are well. Babies with reflux do not always lose weight; in fact, some gain a lot of weight, as feeding is a comfort for them.

Don't be afraid to ask for help

Gastric reflux can be treated, so if this is happening to you, get professional help. See a general practitioner or a paediatrician and talk to them about the signs and symptoms and what treatment is available. They may prescribe medicine can take two to seven days to work. In most communities, there are nurses who can help you become educated on the development and progress of your baby. You know your baby best, so if you have any concerns don't be afraid to ask for help!

Sooth baby with a Soother

I find a soother really important in the treatment of reflux. Most babies love to suck for comfort and babies with reflux are often on the high end of the percentile chart. Drinking also soothes the feeling of heartburn so I always encourage a feed before settling baby with a soother.

Uptight, Upright

Holding the baby upright is really important. The use of a baby carrier may help during the day, but the baby is safest in the arms of mother or partner.

Choose the right Teat

Often an antacid is used in conjunction with the medicine and in some cases a thickener to add to expressed breast milk or formula. The thickener helps decrease the vomiting by thickening up the milk, preventing vomiting and decreasing acid reflux. It's important to change the teat size when you add a thickener. If not the baby will suck and suck and not get any milk. I recommend the NUK Nature Sense Bottles in size Large as it can easily cope with thickened milk.

While reflux may be getting you down and seem like a losing battle, know that reflux is very common, you're not alone and it does go away with time. Only a tiny percentage of babies have symptoms after one year old. In the meantime, follow these tips, give your baby lots of love and remember to look after yourself too.

Love Midwife Cath xx

No medicine should be given to your baby without having a physical check by a doctor. Do not use or share medicine that was prescribed for another baby or child.

Midwife Cath is a fully-qualified nurse, midwife, maternal and child health nurse. Over her 40-year career, Midwife Cath has delivered over 10,000 babies. Her areas of expertise include women's health, pre-pregnancy, antenatal care and education, pregnancy, labour and birth, postnatal care, breastfeeding and parenting. Midwife Cath is a proud NUK ambassador.