

Is it Colic, Infant Reflux or GERD?

Learn How to Tell the Difference

It can sometimes be difficult for a parent to understand whether the baby has colic or reflux (and even GERD) since some of the symptoms (eg. poor sleep, constant crying) can be similar. It's also extremely important to rule out reflux as a cause of this crying, as it's becoming widely acknowledged that many cases of colic are actually undiagnosed and untreated cases of reflux. In these cases, simply treating the reflux may eliminate the colicky behavior. The easiest way to determine whether a baby has colic or reflux is to look at the definitions and symptoms of each. Then compare them to your child's symptoms.

COLIC

Colic can be defined as uncontrollable, extended crying in babies who are

otherwise healthy and well-fed. All babies cry, but when they cry for more than three hours a day, three to four days a week, they are said to have colic. Symptoms of ColicThe main symptom is continuous crying for long periods of time. This crying can occur at any time of day but it usually gets worse at night. It's not believed that colic is caused by pain although a colicky baby may look uncomfortable or appear to be in pain. They may lift their head, draw their legs up to their abdomen, pass gas and become red-faced. Poor sleep habits is also common.

REFLUX

The term

reflux is a shorter way of referring to GER (Gastro Esophageal Reflux) and is simply defined as the backward flow of stomach contents up the esophagus. GER is a physiological process that happens to everyone from time to time, particularly after meals and many times we are not even aware it is happening. In babies it generally occurs from immaturity of the LES (Lower Esophageal Sphincter) which is the muscle between the stomach and esophagus. Some common symptoms of uncomplicated reflux can include:

constant or sudden

crying or colic like symptoms

irritability and pain

poor sleep habits typically with frequent waking

arching their necks and back during or after eating spitting-up or vomiting

wet burp or frequent hiccups

frequent ear infections or sinus congestion

Your child does not need to exhibit all of these symptoms, in fact, only having one of the above could mean they have reflux. It does not; however, mean they need treatment. If your child is showing one or more of the above symptoms but is otherwise happy and healthy then some simple lifestyle modifications will likely make life better until they outgrow it. Visit InfantRefluxDisease.com for more info on treatments.

GERD

In contrast, GER (Gastro Esophageal Reflux) is referred to as GERD (Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disease) when complications arise. GERD is a pathological process and the complications can be typical (failure to thrive, feeding and oral aversions, esophagitis, etc) or atypical (wheezing, pneumonia, chronic sinusitis, etc). Patients with GERD have complications arising from their GER that necessitate medical intervention. GERD is also referred to as "Pathogenic GER". It is estimated that approximately one in three hundred children will present symptoms of GERD and is more common in children with neurological impairments. Symptoms indicative of Reflux Disease or GERD:

refusing food or accepting

only a few bites despite being hungry or the exact opposite requiring constant *small meals or liquid

food/oral aversions

anemia

excessive drooling

running nose, sinus infections

swallowing problems, gagging, choking

chronic hoarse voice

frequent red, sore throat without infection present

apnea

chronic ear infections

respiratory problems pneumonia, bronchitis, wheezing, asthma, night-time cough, aspiration

gagging themselves with their fingers or fist (sign of esophagitis)

poor weight gain, weight loss, failure to thrive

erosion of dental enamel

neck arching (Sandifer's Syndrome)

bad breath

About the Author

Early in 2001 Roni MacLean launched InfantRefluxDisease.com. One of the best sources of info online, it's an informational website to help others survive what MacLean had been through with their daughter. She has also written the highly acclaimed book, *Life on the Reflux Roller Coaster*, published in 2004. Currently she dedicates all her time to the website and it's visitors.