

Management of infantile colic

This bulletin aims to support the review of these treatments for infantile colic, reviewing the continued need for treatment and discontinuation of prescribing these preparations with insufficient good-quality evidence for their use.

Key recommendations

- Provide support to parents and reassurance that infantile colic is a common problem and should resolve by six months of age.
- Review patients prescribed lactase (Colief® Infant Drops), simeticone (Dentinox® Infant Colic Drops and Infacol® Colic Relief Drops) or gripe water for the management of infant colic and discontinue prescribing.
- Do not recommend maternal diet modification if breastfeeding, or changing the infant milk formula preparation, probiotic supplements, herbal supplements, and manipulative strategies such as spinal manipulation or cranial osteopathy.
- Give advice on appropriate sources of information and support and refer to the family's health visitor or nursery nurse to advise on strategies that may help to soothe a crying infant. In addition, parents/carers should be encouraged to look after their own wellbeing.
- Consider an underlying cause if symptoms are severe or persist after four months and consider seeking specialist advice or referral if necessary. A feeding assessment from an appropriate person may be useful.
- As with all changes, these should be tailored to the individual patient.

National guidance

Infantile colic is a self-limiting condition which is defined clinically as repeated episodes of excessive and inconsolable crying in an infant that otherwise appears to be healthy and thriving.¹ Typically, an infant with colic presents with excessive, inconsolable crying which starts in the first weeks of life and resolves by around three to four months of age, crying most often occurs in the late afternoon or evening and the infant may draw its knees up to its abdomen or arch its back when crying.¹ It causes parental or carer stress, anxiety, depression and sleep deprivation.¹

The NICE Clinical Knowledge Summary on the management of infantile colic states that there is insufficient good-quality evidence to support the prescribing or recommendation of medication for infantile colic.¹

The NHS England Guidance on which over the counter (OTC) items should not be routinely prescribed in primary care, includes treatments for infant colic.² This states the condition is self-limiting and will clear up on its own without the need for treatment.²

In Scotland, infants with colic may be suitable for NHS Pharmacy First Scotland (NHS PFS), except for those who are unwell or failing to thrive. NHS PFS is a service designed to encourage the public to visit their community pharmacy as the first port of call for all minor illnesses and common clinical conditions.³

A similar scheme in Wales, the Community Pharmacy Common Ailments Scheme, includes colic as an advice only condition with no treatment available on NHS, as there is insufficient evidence to support the use of medicines to treat colic on the NHS.⁴

Savings available

In England, Scotland and Wales, £250,088 is spent annually (NHSBSA Feb - Apr 22, and Public Health Scotland Feb - Apr 22) on lactase (Colief® Infant Drops), simeticone (Dentinox® Infant Colic Drops and Infacol® Colic Relief Drops), and gripe water.

An 80% reduction in the prescribing of these products **could release savings of approximately to £201,029 across England, Scotland and Wales. This equates to £284 per 100,000 population.**

References

1. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Clinical Knowledge Summaries (CKS). Colic – infantile. Last revised March 2022. <https://cks.nice.org.uk/colic-infantile>
2. NHS England. Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care: Guidance for CCGs. March 2018. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/conditions-for-which-over-the-counter-items-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-in-primary-care-guidance-for-ccgs/>
3. NHS Scotland. NHS Pharmacy First Scotland. Signposting Guidance for General Practice Teams. Last updated June 2021. https://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/publications/NHS_Pharmacy_First_Scotland.pdf
4. Community Pharmacy Wales. Common Ailments Service. [http://www.cpwales.org.uk/getattachment/Services-and-commissioning/Choose-Pharmacy-Services/Common-Ailments-Service-\(1\)/CAS-information-for-pharmacy-staff.pdf.aspx?lang=en-GB](http://www.cpwales.org.uk/getattachment/Services-and-commissioning/Choose-Pharmacy-Services/Common-Ailments-Service-(1)/CAS-information-for-pharmacy-staff.pdf.aspx?lang=en-GB) Last accessed 24/11/21.

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| Additional resources available | Bulletin | https://www.prescqipp.info/our-resources/bulletins/bulletin-303-management-of-infantile-colic/ |
| | Tools | |
| | Data pack | https://data.prescqipp.info/views/B303_Managementofinfantilecolic/FrontPage?%3Aembed=y&%3Aiid=1&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y |

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