



Know a Baby With Colic?

By Massage Therapy Foundation Contributor

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Have you ever known a newborn baby that cried a lot and wondered, "does that baby have colic?" Babies that cry at least three hours a day, three days a week, for three consecutive weeks, are considered to have colic. Newborn babies with colic cry often, appear unusually fussy and have problems sleeping peacefully. These issues associated with colic often result in maternal depression, parenting stress and family mental health problems, in general.

Through the ages mothers and other family members have resorted to myriad methods to comfort babies with colic, everything from holding, rocking, patting the baby's back, and massage to driving around the neighborhood with the baby in the car seat, hoping for a reprieve.

In an effort to comfort babies and support parents this MTF Writing Group review will highlight the findings of a recent study that put some of these age-old remedies to the test.

The Colic Clinical Trial

Sheidaei and colleagues, planned a randomized clinical trial, aimed to explore the efficacy of massage therapy compared to rocking to reduce colic symptoms in a sample of newborn babies. They planned to measure duration and number of cries, sleep duration and severity of infant colic. Sheidaei and colleagues, conducted a single blind randomized clinical trial study, meaning the participants were randomly assigned to either the treatment (i.e., massage) or control (i.e., rocking) group, and the pediatrician and hospital staff were not given information about group assignment. They recruited one-hundred colicky infants younger than 12 weeks old, who were full-term birth, with no known diseases, receiving no medical treatments for colic and no allergy to lactose.

Also, the infants had no skin problems or limitations in receiving massage. Infants who underwent traditional and medical treatments during the study were excluded from the study. Mothers who smoked

during pregnancy, had severe anxiety, or failed to perform the intervention correctly were also excluded from study participation.



Consenting parents were randomly assigned into one of two groups treatment (i.e., massage) or control (i.e., rocking). An expert taught the mothers in the treatment group to massage their babies. Infants received a massage for 15-20 minutes once during a day and once at night before sleeping for a one-week period, or rocked gently for 5-25 minutes when colic symptoms appeared. Parents recorded the details of the colic symptoms in a diary daily. The research team conducted a one-week follow-up.

The Trial Outcomes

At baseline, symptoms of colic, including number of cries were equal between the two groups, however data indicates participants in the treatment group (i.e., massage) had significantly better improvements than the control group (i.e., rocking). The mean number of daily cries was 4.26 (± 1.40) in the massage and 6.9 (± 2.14) the rocking groups.

Interestingly, at baseline, the mean of cry duration (4.96 hours in the massage and three hours in rocking groups), sleep duration (9.29 hours in the massage and 12.24 hours in the rock groups), and infant colic severity were significantly different. These differences were in favor of the rocking group. This further supports the value of massage for colicky infants since the treatment group made significant gain beyond the control group even though the control group was better off at baseline.

So, what does this mean for new parents and their babies? This study demonstrated massage improved colic symptoms during a one-week intervention on all outcomes measured. Previous studies have focused on the

effect of massage on the rate and duration of colic cries, however this study also showed:

1. Crying severity was reduced during a one-week intervention.
2. Massage helps infants with colic to have better sleep.

Overall findings suggest massage therapy is more effective for treating infant colic symptoms than rocking. Though these findings are compelling, the research team noted two limitations:

- Mothers performed the massage at home, so massage methods were not validated. The mothers' massages were examined three times and had access to the advisor for any questions.
- Because the study duration was short, future studies should explore the effect of massage on infantile colic symptoms in a wider time-frame.

What This Means For You

Infant massage is a popular topic and has been studied in a variety of settings to promote infant growth, mother-baby bonding, and to improve infant outcomes in general. This study provides compelling data to add to this growing body of literature.

- The use of a single-blind randomized controlled trial allows data inferences to be made about the benefits of using parent-provided massage to babies with colic, compared to rocking.
- Overall, this data can inform clinical practice recommendations to use massage for responding to the needs of newborns with colic.
- As massage practitioners look for ways to expand their practice, teaching parents infant massage holds promise for supporting the growth of healthy babies in the natural setting of their homes.

Editor's Note: The preceding research synopsis is authored by volunteers from MTF's Writing Workgroup. To learn more please visit their [columnist page](#).

Resource

- Sheidaei A, Abadi A, Zayeri F, et al. The effectiveness of massage therapy in the treatment of infantile colic symptoms: A randomized controlled trial. *Med J Islam Repub Iran*, 2016; 30: 351.

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