

Is it true that flatulence is more common in male infants?

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1 Introduction

Eric Prochnow raised the question why male infants suffer more from flatulence than female infants. This article implicated the following hypotheses, which are equivalent to the public opinion on excessive crying in infants: 1. There is an organic cause (flatulence) for excessive crying. 2. Flatulence is more common in male infants. The careful lecture of the article raised some more questions. The first question is, whether male infants suffer really more often from flatulence than females. The second question is, whether there is a link between flatulence or any other gastrointestinal pathology and excessive crying (Wessel's colic). The reasons for flatulence in infants remain also unclear; aerophagia, proteins and drinking habits have been discussed. In my opinion, answers to these questions may be helpful to solve the question why male infants suffer more from flatulence.

2 The Question of Gender

A short research on the internet provided some insight in the public opinion on Wessel's colic. In fact, a lot of people think, that excessive crying is more common in male infants. Even some websites of insurance companies and the pharmaceutical industry (see junq.info, comments on the article „Why do male infants have more flatulence than female infants?“; JUNQ,1, Issue 1-OQ, 1, 2010) state, that excessive crying is more common in male infants. A short review of current studies published on Pubmed revealed, that there is not much evidence regarding this topic. (Talachian et al. 2008), (Lucassen et al. 2001) statet that male gender is not a risk factor for excessive crying. One dutch study found out, that Wessel's colic is more frequent in male infants (van der Wal et al. 1998). In general, it remains unclear, whether excessive crying is more common in male infants, since some studies indicate that this is true, while others could not find any correlation between gender and excessive crying. Since these studies have been conducted in different places it also remains unclear, whether excessive crying, and the perception of excessive crying by the parents is influenced by genetic or cultural factors. This may be due to the fact that most studies were not designed in order to solve this question. Further research is necessary to find out the truth. The results may be valuable for research projects regarding gender related differences in pain perception and communication.

2 Flatulence and Colic

The link between excessive crying and gastrointestinal pathology, e.g. flatulence is not clear. Current research indicates that there are organic causes in only 5% of the cases of excessive crying and radiographic studies did not reveal any gastrointestinal pathology- e.g. increased gastrointestinal air. (Roberts et al. 2004, Barr 1998) Still, there seems to be evidence, that excessive crying is associated with increased levels of motilin (Shenassa et al. 2004).

Since breastfeeding is the main protective factor, it seems to be possible that the baby's crying is caused either by proteins in artificial milk products or by the leak of any protective factor included in the mother's milk (Saavedra et al. 2003).

Some research has been conducted to find out, whether parental factors influence a child's crying patterns, or whether psychological factors influence the parents' perception of the child's behaviour. But most studies regarding these topics, e.g. to find out whether anxious parents complain more often about excessive crying, did not lead to unambiguous results. One article on an iranian study stated, that birth order is a risk factor, since the first born infant would suffer from excessive crying more often.

4 Conclusion

The question, whether there is one organic cause for most of the cases of excessive crying in infants remains unsolved. The question, whether male infants suffer more often from excessive crying remains unsolved, too. Since excessive crying is a very common problem and many myths regarding this topic are popular, further research is necessary to help parents and infants. Since there is so little real knowledge on excessive infant crying, valuable and helpful information is not easily accessible for parents. Further research e.g. using telephone interviews would not be very expensive and may provide valuable new information.

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