

## THE BIG

# BURP

By Brette McWhorter Sember

**B**efore you had a baby, burping was something to be concealed, disguised or embarrassed about. It certainly was not something to be excited about. But once you're a parent, you know there is nothing better than a nice, big, loud burp... from your baby, that is. In fact, no feeding is complete without a really big one — almost like the standing ovation at the end of a wonderful concert!

### PARDON ME

They may sound satisfying, but why are burps so important? "Babies need to be burped because they tend to swallow air while they are feeding," explains Ann Douglas, author of *The Mother of All Baby Books*. "If you don't burp the baby, [she] may either burp up some of the feeding in order to get rid of the trapped air or experience discomfort until she gets rid of [it]."

Bottlefed babies may need to be burped more than breastfed babies, explains certified nurse midwife and mother of four Mairi Breen Rothman from the DC Birth Center in Washington, D.C. "It is a good idea to burp the baby halfway through a bottle. Bottles can get air in them, breasts can't. [Occasionally, a] breastfed baby

takes in enough air to form a bubble in his or her belly by having a loose latch or by gulping air while trying to stem a flood just after the letdown reflex occurs," she says.

You won't be burping your baby forever, though. "All babies need to be burped until they are about 4 months old, when they will burp on their own," says Dr. Marla Mikelait, primary care physician at Temple University Children's Medical Center.

### IT'S COMING

Your baby is not going to hold up a sign that says "Burp now please" and there will be no lovely olfactory clues as there are with diaper changes. So how do you know when your baby needs to let one rip? Joyce Anthony from Erie, PA could tell when her son needed to burp. "He would refuse to drink or eat anything else until he did burp, and [he] would squirm a lot."

Kim Fuller from Raleigh, NC always knew if her baby needed to burp. She says, "[He] cried and waved his arms and legs around." Giving your baby the chance to



burp halfway through and after every feeding can eliminate this kind of discomfort.

### IT'S ALL IN THE TECHNIQUE

Getting a baby to burp may be one of the world's finest art forms, according to the moms interviewed for this article, who each had a different technique to recommend. Rothman says she believes the best method is holding baby "high on your shoulder. Gravity is on your side and you also have that nice firm shoulder against baby's belly, which is comforting."

Dr. Mikelaït agrees and specifies, "The baby should be held over the shoulder or in a supported sitting position and gently rubbed or patted on the back. [Baby] should be upright. Parents should be patient when waiting for a burp."

Moms in the trenches have a different take on it. Spencerville, OH mom Jennifer VanSchoyk thinks that most people have burping all wrong. "Most people throw the baby up on their shoulder and beat their backs. I don't think that is necessary. It's jarring to the baby, it wears your arm out and isn't as effective as rubbing their backs." Instead, she thinks parents should lay babies "across your lap face down or up on your shoulder and gently rub in small circles up their back. Sometimes I did a baby massage technique — just small, very light circles on either side of their spine. They loved this. It relaxed them, too."

Her baby's pediatrician taught Shelia Grigsby from Defuniak Springs, FL a method that worked for her. "We learned that holding [baby on our lap, legs toward us, face up with his] head within our hand, raising him slowly [up and out] from our lap with his back fully supported, then lowering him [and pulling him in] to bring him back toward our chest in a [relatively] quick action loosened the gas and the baby was able to burp."

Fuller used to sit her baby up and hold him under the chin "with the area between my thumb and forefinger with the heel of my hand on his chest as I rubbed his back."

Anthony used a different method. "I cupped my hand and patted gently just under his butt, where his legs attached. I either had him against my chest with his head on my shoulder or lying on his tummy across my legs. Both worked equally well."

Hazel Larkin from Singapore doesn't believe in burping at all. "Instead I have found that if you just sit the baby up and slightly to the left, they will burp on their own with a lot less mess than actively burped babies."

#### **BLOCKED BURPS**

If you've patted and rubbed and patted again and that burp is still elusive, there can be a solution. Newport, KY mom

Melissa Sheffels' baby would not burp, would not eat much at one time and was feeding every 2 hours. She tried Mycelin, over-the-counter gas drops. "We tried giving them before his bottle. He burped like a pro, drank twice as much formula and switched to a 4-hour feeding schedule almost immediately."

Belle Wong from Pickering, Ontario, considered using drops for her baby but was concerned when she read the label's warning and the disclaimers on the package. Her pharmacist recommended something else: gripe water. "It's really soda bicarbonate, so it's really like us drinking a carbonated beverage to burp. It worked," she says.

However, despite these success stories, Dr. Mikelaït says for both treatments, "I don't recommend it." She also points out that the drops have not been proven to have any effect. Be sure to talk to your baby's pediatrician before trying any medication.

#### **WET OR DRY**

Gross or not, it's a fact that some burps are just air while others can be wet, bringing up a little bit of what the baby drank. Knowing which one is coming can help you be prepared with a cloth diaper, receiving blanket or other emergency essential. Van Schoyk says it's something you eventually learn: "usually you just know."

Grigsby never really knew what kind of burp to expect. "I always draped a cloth diaper over my shoulder and if the baby was sick, I would burp him in the kitchen where the tile floor made cleaning up easier."

Nurse midwife Rothman recommends that to avoid a wet burp, "you can minimize the risk of spitting up by not pressing on a baby's tummy during burping and by not burping when baby is clearly comfortable."

A good, loud burp may be just what you're looking for after a feeding, and there's no need for anyone to say "excuse me!" ☺

*About the author: Brette McWhorter Sember is a mother of two, a former attorney and the author of many books.*

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