

## INFANT BREATHING

Babies tend to breathe with an irregular pattern of fairly rapid shallow breaths, followed by several seconds of no visible respiration. This is referred to as **periodic breathing**. It is normal, and does not signify true apnea. It is caused by an immature breathing regulation center in the newborn's brain. This phenomenon specifically does not involve any color change - the baby stays pink. Touching your baby gently will stimulate him to breathe again.

**Sneezing** is normal and expected in newborns. Dry, possibly dust-laden air is irritating to the newborn nasal membranes for the first few weeks. This does not signify allergies or illness. **Nasal stuffiness** is caused largely by the same factors that cause sneezing, with an added twist: the soft palate (the flap of tissue at the back of the roof of the mouth, from which hangs the uvula) is supposed to seal off the rear of the nasal passages during swallowing or spitting up. This system doesn't work well in newborns. There is considerable leakage and regurgitation of milk into the nasal passages from the rear, causing stuffiness and some difficulty breathing. Additionally the cartilage forming the nose is soft and flexible and can vibrate with breathing mimicking the noise of a stuffy nose. When symptoms are severe and inhibit feeding, a few drops of saline in each nostril followed by good suctioning, gives temporary relief.

Newborns have **hiccups** quite often. No one knows with absolute certainty why this is, but hiccups are caused by reflex stimulation of the vagus nerve to the diaphragm. We assume the frequency of hiccups in newborns is a feature of their neurologic immaturity. Hiccups are harmless, do not bother the baby in the least, and go away in a few weeks.