

Breath Holding Spells in a Very Young Infant

Breath holding spells is a common childhood problem affecting children generally between the ages of six months and five years(1). We report here a case of breath holding spells starting at the age of 20 days.

A one month 20 days old term baby delivered normally per vaginum in the hospital, presented with history of 5-6 episodes of abrupt cessation of breathing followed by blueness of face and limpness during bouts of crying for the last one month. The child usually cried when hungry, sometimes without apparent reason, abruptly stopped crying and breathing, became blue in the face and limp. There were no accompanying involuntary passage of urine or stool, movements of the eyes, lips, face or limbs, fever or postictal phase. Family, perinatal history and general physical examination including detailed cardiovascular system examination to rule out cyanotic heart disease were unrevealing and growth and developmental milestones were appropriate for age.

In spite of the age of the child and the fact that the entity finds no mention in

the books of neonatology(2,3), we made the diagnosis of breath holding spells because of the classic sequence of events(1). After a bout of crying most of the air in the lungs is exhaled, vocal cords which were narrowed during crying close, breath is held in expiration for a few seconds and the child becomes cyanosed and limp.

Cyanotic breath holding spells are precipitated by anger or frustration(1). There is evidence to believe that these emotions may be experienced by an infant by the time he attains social smile between 3 and 5 weeks of age(4). Thus 6 months as the cut off age for breath holding spells may be rather arbitrary.

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