



## Crying baby: What to do when your newborn cries

Newborn crying jags are inevitable, but a crying baby can test your patience all the same. Here's help soothing a crying baby—and renewing your ability to handle the tears.

### Decoding the tears

A crying baby is trying to tell you something. Your job is to figure out why your baby is crying and what—if anything-- you can do about it.

Consider what your baby could be thinking:

- **I'm hungry.** Most newborns eat every few hours round-the-clock. Some babies become frantic when hunger strikes. They might get so worked up by the time the feeding begins that they gulp air with the milk, which can cause spitting up, trapped gas and more crying. To avoid such frenzy, respond to early signs of hunger. If your baby begins to gulp during a feeding, take a break.
- **I need to burp.** During and after each feeding, take time to burp your baby.
- **I'm wet.** For some babies, a wet or soiled diaper is a surefire way to trigger tears. Gas or indigestion can have the same effect. Check your baby's diaper often to make sure it's clean and dry.
- **I'm tired.** Tired babies are often fussy—and your baby might need more sleep than you think. Newborns often sleep up to 16 hours a day. Some newborns sleep even more.
- **I'd rather be bundled.** Some babies feel most secure in a swaddle wrap. Snugly wrap your baby in a receiving blanket or other small, lightweight blanket.
- **I want to move.** Sometimes a rocking session or walk through the house is enough to soothe a crying baby. In other cases, a change of position is all that's needed. Keeping safety precautions in mind, try a baby swing or vibrating infant seat. Weather permitting, a head outdoors with the stroller. You might even want to buckle up for a ride in the car.

- **I'm lonely.** Sometimes simply seeing you, hearing your voice or being cuddled can stop the tears. Gentle massage or light pats on the back might soothe a crying baby, too.
- **I'm hot.** A baby who's too hot is likely to be uncomfortable. The same goes for a baby who's too cold. Add or remove a layer of clothing as needed.
- **I want to suck on something.** Sucking is a natural reflex. For many babies, it's a comforting, soothing activity. If your baby isn't hungry, try a clean finger or pacifier.
- **I've had enough.** Too much noise, movement or visual stimulation might drive your baby to tears. Move to a calmer environment or place your baby in the crib. White noise—such as a recording of ocean waves or the monotonous sound of an electric fan or vacuum cleaner—might help your crying baby relax.
- **It's just that time of day.** Many babies have predictable periods of fussiness during the day. This kind of crying can help your baby get rid of excess energy. There may be little you can do but comfort your baby as the crying runs its course.
- **My tummy hurts.** If you're breast-feeding your baby, the flavor of the milk might change in response to what you eat and drink. If you suspect that a certain food or drink is making your baby fussier than usual, avoid it for several days to see if it makes a difference.

Over time you might be able to identify your baby's needs by the way he or she is crying. For example, a hungry cry might be short and low-pitched, while a cry of pain might be a sudden, long, high-pitched shriek. Picking up on any patterns can help you better respond to your baby's cries.

## Crying it out

If you've tried everything and your baby is still upset, consider letting your baby cry it out. While listening to your baby wail can be agonizing, keep in mind that some babies can't fall asleep without crying. Your baby might go to sleep more quickly if left to cry for a little while.

## Is it just fussiness, or is it colic?

Some babies have frustrating periods of intense, inconsolable crying known as colic—often starting a few weeks after birth and improving by age 3 months. Colic is defined as crying more than three hours a day, three days a week for more than three weeks in an otherwise well-fed, healthy baby. The crying often begins suddenly and for no apparent reason. During an episode, you baby might be difficult—or even impossible—to comfort.

What causes colic remains a mystery, and there are few treatment options. If you're concerned about colic, make an appointment. We can make sure your baby is otherwise healthy and help you learn how to care for a colicky baby.

## Taking care of yourself

It's tough to listen to your baby cry. To take the best care of your baby, it's important to take care of yourself, too.

- **Take a break.** Ask your spouse, partner or another loved one to take over for a while. Even an hour on your own can help renew your coping strength.
- **Make healthy lifestyle choices.** Eat a healthy diet. Include physical activity in your daily routine. If you can, sleep when the baby sleeps—even during the day. Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- **Remember that it's temporary.** Crying spells often peak at about six to eight weeks and then gradually decrease.
- **Know when to call the doctor.** If you're concerned about the crying, if your baby isn't eating, sleeping or behaving like usual, make an appointment. We can help you tell the difference between normal tears and something more serious.

It's also important to recognize your limits. If your baby's crying is causing you to lose control, put the baby in a safe place—such as a crib—and go to another room to collect yourself. If necessary, contact your doctor, a local crisis intervention service or a mental health help line for additional support.