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2021

Responding to Your Baby's Cries

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Responding To Your Baby's Cries

Crying serves several useful purposes for your baby. It allows her to call for help when she's hungry or uncomfortable. It shuts out sights, sounds, and other sensations too intense to suit her. And it helps her release tension.

You may notice your baby has fussy periods, even when she's not hungry, uncomfortable, or tired. At times it may seem like nothing can console her. Right after these spells, she may seem more alert than before, and then may sleep more deeply than usual. This kind of fussy crying seems to help babies get rid of excess energy to allow for a more contented state.



As you get to know your infant's crying patterns, you may feel as if you can identify specific needs by the way she cries. Is she hungry? Angry? Distressed or in pain? Sleepy? Each baby will use her voice differently.

Different types of cries

Sometimes different types of cries overlap. Newborns generally wake up hungry and crying for food. If you're not quick to respond, your baby's hunger cry may turn to a wail of rage. You'll hear the difference. As your baby matures, her cries will become stronger, louder, and more insistent. They'll also begin to vary more, as if to convey different needs and desires.

The best way to handle crying is to respond promptly during her first few months. You cannot spoil a young baby with attention, and if you answer her calls for help, she'll cry less overall.

When responding to your child's cries, try to meet her most pressing need first. If she's cold and hungry and her diaper is wet, warm her up, change her diaper, and then feed her. If there's a shrieking or panicked quality to the cry, consider if a piece of clothing or something else is making her uncomfortable. Perhaps a strand of hair is caught around a finger or toe. If she's warm, dry, and well fed but the crying won't stop, try the following consoling techniques. Find the ones that work best for your baby:

- Rocking, either in a rocking chair or in your arms as you sway from side to side
- Gently stroking her head or patting her back or chest
- Safe swaddling (wrapping her snugly in a receiving blanket)
- Singing or talking
- Playing soft music
- Walking her in your arms, a stroller, or a carriage
- Rhythmic white noise and vibration
- Burping her to relieve any trapped gas bubbles
- Warm baths (most babies like this, but not all)

When all else fails

When all else fails, the best approach is simply to leave the baby alone in a safe location such as a crib. Many babies cannot fall asleep without crying and will fall asleep quicker if left to cry. The crying shouldn't last long if the child is truly tired.

If the crying does not stop, but gets more intense and continues throughout the day or night, it may be caused by colic ([/English/tips-tools/symptom-checker/Pages/symptomviewer.aspx?symptom=Crying+Baby+-+Before+3+Months+Old](#)). Most often, colic means simply that the child is unusually sensitive to stimulation or can't yet console herself. As your baby matures, this inability to self-console—marked by constant crying—will improve. [Back to Top](#)

In breastfeeding ([/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/default.aspx](#)) babies, sometimes colic is a sign of sensitivity to a food in the mother's diet. Colic drops are expensive, and studies suggest that they're not effective. You can look into more non-medication options such as tweaks to your diet, slow feeding, and appropriate burping to help.

If your baby is inconsolable, she may be sick. Check her temperature ([/English/health-issues/conditions/fever/Pages/How-to-Take-a-Childs-Temperature.aspx](#)). If you take it rectally and it is 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) or higher, she could have an infection. Contact your pediatrician.

The more relaxed you remain, the easier it will be to console your child. Even very young babies are sensitive to tension and react to it by crying. Hearing a wailing newborn can be agonizing, but letting your frustration turn to anger or panic will only intensify your infant's screams.

Taking a break

If you start to feel you can't handle the situation, set the baby down in a safe location and get help from a family member or friend. This will give you needed relief, and a new face can sometimes calm your baby. No matter how impatient or angry you feel, do not shake or hit the baby. Shaking an infant ([/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Abusive-Head-Trauma-Shaken-Baby-Syndrome.aspx](#)) hard can cause blindness, brain damage, or even death. It's important to share this information on crying with anyone else who cares for your baby, including your spouse, partner, or babysitter.

Remember

Above all, don't take your newborn's crying personally. She's not crying because you're a bad parent or because she doesn't like you. All babies cry, often without any apparent cause. Newborns routinely cry one to four hours a day. It's part of adjusting to this strange new life outside the womb.

No parent can console his or her child every time she cries, so don't expect to be a miracle worker. Instead, take a realistic approach. Line up some help, get plenty of rest, and enjoy all those wondrous moments with your child.

More information

- [Tips for Coping with a New Baby During COVID-19 \(/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Tips-for-Coping-with-a-New-Baby-During-COVID-19.aspx\)](#)
- [Creating Positive Experiences for Your Infant \(/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Creating-Positive-Experiences-for-Your-Infant.aspx\)](#)

Last Updated 4/21/2021

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