

15 Ways To Soothe a Fussy Baby



Bundle of joy? Or bundle of noise? During the first few months of life, most babies cry a full two or three hours each day! Needless to say, many new parents are unprepared for the amount of time their newborns spend fussing.

In most cases, crying is normal and healthy — although admittedly not much fun for either parent or child. That being said, there are some things you can do to make it easier for both of you. First, learn why babies cry the way they do (we think you'll be reassured). Then, develop some parent-tested strategies for soothing your little tearful

earful. And remember: it won't last forever. We promise.

Why Newborns Cry

Crying is your baby's primary means of communication, translating to: "I'm hungry!" "I'm tired!" or "I'm scared!" Babies also cry when they're hot or cold, anxious, and need a diaper change. Over time, you will learn to recognize your baby's different cries.

Furthermore, researchers have found that many newborns follow the same pattern of fussing during the first three months of life. Regular bouts of crying generally begin during a baby's second week, often in the late afternoon or early evening. These fussy periods will increase in duration in the weeks to follow, until peaking at six to eight weeks. Fortunately, by the third month, they begin tapering off.

Crying is not abnormal or unhealthy — in fact, quite the opposite. Crying is actually physiologically important to your baby's health. At baby's birth, you eagerly awaited that first cry — the signal that all is well. That initial cry cleared baby's airways, allowing him to start breathing on his own. Similarly, in the first weeks of life, crying helps keep your baby's lungs healthy. After all, babies don't get much physical activity, and crying opens the air sacs in the lungs. You might say that crying is your infant's workout!

Colic? Or Stress?

Some babies cry more than others, earning them the title of "colicky babies." When a baby sobs for extended periods at regular intervals without apparent physical cause, we used to attribute this to colic.

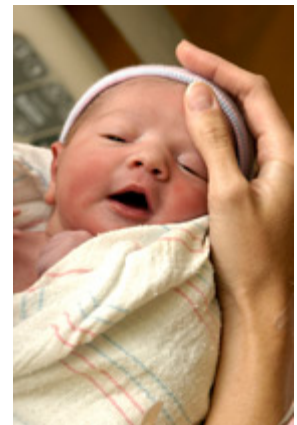
Pediatricians once believed that colicky babies had immature digestive systems, which resulted in gas pains. But research indicates that so-called colicky babies are no different physically than their non-colicky counterparts. In fact, babies have more gas in their stomachs after a crying period than before, the result of swallowed air.

Now, experts hypothesize that some babies cry more than others because they are more sensitive to their surroundings, possibly because their central nervous systems or coping mechanisms are less well developed. While some babies — confronted with a noisy party or a trip to the mall — tune out and fall asleep, others become over-stimulated.

After all, baby's life in the womb was quiet, dark and unchanging. Compare that to the bright, noisy, unpredictable world your newborn now finds herself in! A sensitive baby may be easily overwhelmed. Experts believe that crying is a way for babies to cleanse or rebalance their nervous systems, allowing them to fall asleep. No wonder fussy periods generally start late in the day — the accumulated result of the day's stress.

Take Preventive Measures

If you have a sensitive baby, one way to limit fussy periods is to follow a consistent schedule with regular naps and mealtimes. Avoid exposing baby to overly stimulating situations, such as noise, crowds and excessive movement.



It is never too early to begin establishing calming bedtime routines, such as rocking and lullabies. You can also encourage baby to practice self-soothing, offering him a pacifier or helping him to find his fist. Learn to read your baby's physical cues. Often, infants squirm, yawn, blink or turn their heads away when they're reaching their limit. By removing your baby from a situation before it becomes too overwhelming, you may be able to head off — or at least minimize — the crying period that follows.

No, You Won't Spoil Your Baby

Forget the old wives' tale that too much attention will spoil your newborn. It is your job as a parent to comfort and reassure your child. Furthermore, research suggests that a swift, comforting parental response actually reduces crying time!

Some experts suggest that you develop a sequence of strategies for soothing your infant. Try the suggestions below, and see which are most effective. When baby's fussy periods occur, put these strategies to work — cycling from one to the next if necessary. But try each one for at least five to ten minutes before moving on to the next.

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1. Get moving! Many babies respond positively to motion. Try rocking, walking or slow dancing with baby.
2. Place baby in a wearable sling or carrier, and go about your business. Baby may find your proximity calming. And because your arms are free for other activities, it may help you maintain your own composure.
3. Play soft, calming music. Dim the lights, lower your voice, and put on a collection of lullabies or classical music. Nature sounds work well, too. It will calm both of you.
4. Get good vibrations! Many parents swear by vibrating baby rockers and carriers.
5. Try a change of scene. Tour the backyard, take a walk or a jog, or take a ride in the car.
6. Change baby's position. Some parents suggest lying baby face down across your lap, with a warm towel placed underneath.
7. Give baby a gentle massage. Babies crave human touch; some find massages truly relaxing.
8. Give baby a warm bath.
9. Try distracting your infant with a mirror or a drawing of a human face.
10. Allow baby comfort sucking. Offer baby a pacifier, your finger or her fist.
11. Try swaddling. Some babies love to be swaddled because it reminds them of the womb.
12. Run your appliances. White noise really works! A number of parents report that vacuum cleaners, dryers and dishwashers soothe their cranky infants.
13. Put your clothes dryer to work. Buckle your baby securely in his baby seat and place it on top of your operating clothes dryer, holding firmly onto the seat. (NEVER let go of the seat or leave baby unattended.)
14. Lie your infant down under a slowly circulating ceiling fan. The combined motion and sound may calm her.
15. If nothing works, lay baby in her crib for a while. Sometimes, all your "soothing" may actually only stimulate her further. You can go in every few minutes, offer reassurance and check on your infant. Taking a mini-break can be good for both of you.

Remember, it is important to take care of yourself as well during these first months. If possible, alternate shifts with your spouse or partner. If a relative or friend is willing to lend a pair of loving arms, seize the offer. Take a bath, go for a walk, have a soothing cup of tea. While it's not proven, some experts hypothesize that babies may pick up on their parents' anxiety, which only makes things worse. It's not just okay to take a break...it's a necessity.

In closing: take heart! Most babies outgrow their fussy periods at about three months. And according to one study, babies who were considered difficult as infants developed into the most delightful toddlers!