



## What Should I Do When My Baby Cries? (Adapted from Healthy Steps)

New parents look forward to the day when they will be at home with their newborn. The familiar comfort of home is where their new relationship can blossom. One of the most important things you will both learn is what to do when the baby cries. Newborns cry to express needs such as hunger or discomfort. It is their earliest form of vocal communication. Newborns also cry when they are unwell.

Normal babies cry increasing amounts each day starting from about 2 weeks of age with average crying at 6 to 8 weeks of 2.75 hours per day! The most crying is from 5 to 10 pm right when you would like to be settling down from the day. After 8 weeks of age the crying gradually decreases to about 1 hour a day by 4 months of age. If your baby was born prematurely, these ages must be adjusted for the expected due date. For example, a baby born 3 weeks early will have the peak crying around 11 weeks old.

If you have tried the following suggestions without success, your baby is behaving differently than usual, or you are worried that your baby is sick, then call your pediatrician or nurse practitioner.

Things to check when your baby is crying:

- Your baby may be hungry, especially if the last feeding seemed light or was about two hours ago. Always think of hunger first. Soon you will learn to distinguish a cry of hunger from all other cries.
- Check for a source of pain like a pin, or a hair wrapped around a body part.
- Your baby may be too hot or too cold, creating a feeling of discomfort. Check to see if the baby is overdressed or underdressed.
- Your baby's diaper may uncomfortably wet. A diaper change may be all that is needed.
- Sometimes babies get bored and need a change of position or location so they have something new to watch or explore.
- Some experts and parents believe that babies cry to release tension. Your baby is adjusting to a new environment and new sensations that she has never experienced before. Responding to all of these sounds, sights, tastes, and touches is a difficult and tiring job for a baby. By the end of the day your baby may just need to cry.
- Some infants can be very sensitive to changes in the environment or can get overloaded by incoming sensations like light, sound, and touch, especially if you have been having a busy day out or with relatives. You may want to experiment with light and sound levels and shielding her. You can discover the environmental conditions that help your baby be most alert and playful or help your baby to be calm, quiet, and ready to sleep.

- Carry your baby around as much as you can. This doesn't spoil her! Instead it makes her cry somewhat less every day. Try an infant carrier that holds the baby close to your body.
- Wrap your baby tightly in a receiving blanket so it holds in his arms. Babies are used to the tight womb and this feels natural to them. Wrapping also keeps the baby's movements from disturbing him.
- Hold your swaddled baby up straight and lift her up and down in large motions
- "White noise" may be comforting for the baby-"shush" in your baby's ear, turn on the vacuum cleaner, play static on the radio or put the infant seat next to the running clothes dryer.
- Put your baby on his side or stomach on your lap or in the bassinet when crying even if this doesn't seem comfortable at first. Now that doctors know to have babies sleep on their backs it may take a little longer for your baby to get used to using this position to calm down.
- Swing your baby in your arms, in a rocking chair, or use a baby swing, best one with a battery that can swing for a long time. Use big swinging movements but be sure to hold her head steady.
- Help your baby suck- on his hand or a pacifier or your finger. Sucking is very soothing. If it becomes a habit it can be changed later when the main crying time is over.
- Experiment with a change of scenery, or no scenery-such as a dark quiet room. Going outdoors often helps a lot.
- Try changes in the baby's position-over your shoulder or over your knee.
- Softly sing to your baby or play soft music.
- Place your baby on your arm facing down and away from you and swing her from side to side.
- Put a pacifier in her mouth and flick it to keep her sucking.
- Feed some weak chamomile tea with sugar (never honey). Don't feed so much that it replaces the breast milk or formula, however.
- Play tapes of a heartbeat-"womb tapes."
- Stroke your baby's head very gently, or lightly pat her back or chest.
- Go for a drive in the car (but only if you are not too upset to be safe).
- Take care of yourself. Having a new baby is hard and constant work and the mother is also recovering from the delivery. Soak in the tub, go for a walk, or do something to restore yourself even a little.
- If you are very sensitive to noise yourself, put in earplugs. You will still hear your baby but it won't hurt as much!

If your baby keeps crying after you have tried everything, stay calm, put her down in her crib and walk away. Babies know when you are upset. No matter how stressed you are, never shake your baby. Shaking your baby can cause blindness, brain damage or even death. If you need a break, call a relative, neighbor or friend to help. All babies cry. You will not be able to comfort your baby every time. That does not mean you are a bad parent. Do the best you can to comfort your baby.

Here's a simple tip to help your baby cry less: **Carry her.** Research shows that babies who are carried more often don't cry as much as other babies and it doesn't spoil them!