

FACTSHEET



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The crying baby

Crying is a normal part of your baby's development and is normal for all babies from all cultural backgrounds.

Crying is an important way your baby can let you know that something is upsetting them and that they need you.

When babies cry they may be:

- hungry or thirsty
- too hot or too cold
- unwell or in pain
- over-tired or overstimulated
- uncomfortable
- anxious of being alone
- scared or startled, needing to be settled by holding close and cuddling



Ask for advice from a Doctor, a Child and Family Health nurse, ring Health Direct or go to your local hospital if you feel:

- the sound of the baby's crying changes
- sudden onset of unusual crying
- your baby seems to be sick, or unwell
- your baby has new symptoms such as fever or vomiting
- your baby is refusing feeds

- the crying is affecting your relationship with your baby or your partner
- nothing you try is reducing the crying
- you are not coping with the stress of the crying
- you are worried something might have happened to them, or there has been any kind of injury.

Quick Tips - What to try

If you have made all the obvious checks (hunger, thirst, nappy change) and your baby just won't stop crying, try:

- another feed- as your baby may still be hungry
- cuddle your baby, rock your baby close to your chest so the baby can feel your heart beating
- take your baby for a walk in the fresh air
- sing or talk to your baby
- wrap your baby in a small soft sheet so the baby feels secure and try to settle your baby in a safe, dark and quiet place.

It is important to try to stay calm (which is not easy) you will find it more difficult to comfort your baby if you are very upset. You can increase your feeling of calmness by deep breathing, singing quietly, listening to your favourite music, thinking of your favourite place or even your favourite food. Try to slow your breathing down. A calm heartbeat will help your baby. Try to breathe in to the count of 5 and out to the count of 4. Watch an internet film on calming.

If these things haven't worked, read further for some more detail on things that you can try.

The following ideas help with most babies. Try them and over time you will learn what works best for your baby. Give each strategy time to see if it works, try not to switch too quickly from one to another. Some things will work sometimes but not at other times. If something isn't working, it may help to try something different. You can then try the first strategy again a day or two later, or even a week or two later.

Holding

At this time in your baby's life, they are learning to trust you to meet their needs. The best way to meet their needs when they are crying and distressed is to:

- hold and comfort your crying baby if you can
- hold the baby close and snuggled in to you
- try to keep the baby still – jiggling them will not help
- avoid constantly changing the baby's position or continually picking up and putting the baby down
- talk gently and quietly to the baby about anything (such as the weather or how you like watching them)
- remember, you can't make the baby stop crying. You can try to comfort and help the baby to become calm
- it is not easy. Some babies don't like be held too closely, so try holding the baby close but facing away from you and give the baby a chance to calm down.

Moving

- Carry, or gently rock the baby using slow, rhythmical movement. Try not to do too many things at once. Always avoid fast, frantic, rough or shaking movements. (They may be dangerous!)
- Try using an approved pouch or sling. Remember you must always be able to see the baby's face. Try to walk around slowly inside or outside the house.
- Put your baby in a pram, put the pram harness on and walk around outside. This will keep the baby safe while the pram is moving. Go for a walk in a quiet place where you can feel more relaxed.
- Try using a baby rocker or bouncinette for short periods (no longer than 30 minutes). Ensure the harness or belt is used and that the rocker/bouncinette is on the floor, not on a table, chair, bed or bench of any kind.
- You may like to try going for a drive in the car in an attempt to settle the baby. Make sure your baby is in an Australian Standard approved child restraint. Never hold your baby in your arms whilst the car is on.

Sucking

Sucking can help:

- calm your baby
- reduce their crying
- help them to settle.

Let your baby suck on their fist, fingers or thumb.

If you are breast feeding, try offering another breast feed. For formula fed babies, sometimes it might help to give the next feed a little earlier but try not to give formula more often than every three hours as this may encourage snacking or the baby using the bottle as a dummy.

Try giving a dummy if your baby has one - place the dummy just on the baby's lips - the lips will then automatically latch on to the dummy. If your baby is breast-fed try to avoid giving a dummy during the first 4-6 weeks as it may affect his sucking ability and impact on your milk supply

Bathing

A bath may help your baby calm down. Some babies will relax and enjoy a bath but others will become tense and more distressed. Make sure to run the cold water first, and then add hot water. Always check it isn't too hot before putting the baby in the water.

Never leave your baby alone in the bath, even for a single moment.

Baby massage

Rub your baby's tummy gently and firmly in a circular clockwise motion. You can find more information about baby massage in most baby books or the internet.

Playing

Try distracting your baby by playing gently with a favourite toy. This will not always work, especially if the baby is very upset or overtired. If it doesn't work, stop.

What to do when nothing seems to be working

It is very hard to cope with a baby who seems to be crying a lot.

- You may feel helpless when your baby keeps on crying. Remember that you can't always stop the crying but you can still comfort the baby (and you can keep yourself calm). Take about 10 deep slow breaths first if it helps you to calm down.
- Try not to let your baby become too distressed before you decide to pick up and comfort the baby.
- If your baby continues to cry and you are starting to feel desperate, put the baby down in a safe place and walk into another room for a short break. If possible, ask somebody to take over the settling for a while, or phone someone to talk to.
- Never shake your baby. This can lead to Shaken Baby Syndrome and cause permanent damage to their developing brain.

- It may be difficult to ask for help, but it is often easier if someone can help you or even talk to you. It is important to look after your physical, emotional and mental health so that you can continue to care for your baby.
- See if you can get a sleep when baby is sleeping
- You will get a lot of advice from many different people. This can leave you very confused about what to do. The best advice to take is what is safe and what feels right to you.
- You may decide that the best thing to do is to pick up and cuddle the baby. You cannot spoil a small baby by picking them up and cuddling them.
- If your baby is crying often, friends or relatives may suggest you use medications, herbal preparations, change to formula (if breastfeeding) or change the type of formula. You may find it helpful to talk to your Doctor or Child and Family Health Nurse about this.



More information about crying - Why do babies cry so much??

Some babies may cry a lot and look as if they are in pain (e.g. pull up their legs, clench their fists, go red in the face and become very distressed). The crying may be worse in the afternoons and evenings. Some babies may cry for a total of 2-5 hours in a 24 hour period (or more), and yet be healthy and otherwise normal. The peak crying time for a baby usually occurs at 6-8 weeks of life. Remember all babies are different.

After 12 weeks the crying usually becomes less intense and by 4-5months old most babies become more settled. Some babies may continue to cry for longer than that. If you are worried take your baby to see your doctor or local Child and Family Health nurse.

Remember:

Play safe. Pick up and comfort your baby.

Your baby is not "being naughty" or "just putting it over" you

Responding to his/her needs is essential

Babies often need a lot of calming, soothing and holding when they are very upset. Your calm sing-song voice is important.

Babies will not develop bad habits or become spoilt if they are comforted and soothed when they are distressed.

Remember no matter how upset you feel, take care of your baby safely and never shake or hit them.

If you are finding it difficult to cope, or find that you are not enjoying being a parent, ask for help and advice by contacting;

- your Child and Family Health Nurse
- call Health Direct 1800 022 222,
- the Tresillian Telephone Help Line (1800 637 357
- the Karitane Telephone Help Line (1800 677 961)
- your local Community Health Social Worker or
- your family Doctor for help and advice.