

How to Sooth a Crying Infant

Your baby's cry means your baby needs your help. Sometimes it is difficult to know what your baby needs. Some of the reasons babies cry and suggestions for how to calm your baby's crying are listed below. Studies show that mothers who responded quickly to their babies' cries had babies who later cried less. Try to stay calm, because your baby can tell if you are upset. Remember never to shake or hit your baby.

WHY DOES A BABY CRY?

- **Hunger**—Babies cry when they are hungry. Your baby may need to eat more often than you expect. If it has been an hour or more since your baby was last fed, he might be crying because he is hungry.
- **Loneliness**—If your baby becomes calm as soon as you pick her up and stays calm, she missed you! Remember, your baby was in a snugly womb hearing a heartbeat for 9 months. Your baby's need for closeness is very real. You won't spoil a baby by cuddling her when she needs it—or when you need it.
- **Wet diapers or soiled diapers**—Some babies don't mind being wet or soiled; others do. If your baby's diaper is wet or soiled, change him.
- **Cold or hot**—Feel your baby's back or tummy to see if she is too cool or too hot. Adjust clothing to make her comfortable. Dress your baby like you would dress yourself, or with one extra layer in cold weather.
- **Sleepiness**—Some babies fuss a bit before sleeping. Try to maintain a consistent routine before naps and bedtime, provide your baby with objects that comfort him (e.g., a small stuffed toy, a light blanket), and allow your baby a short time to settle before sleeping.
- **Overstimulation**—Lots of people bouncing or talking to your baby may be too much for her. Give your baby some calm and quiet. Rocking her in a quiet, dimly lit room may help.
- **Undressed**—Some babies don't like to be undressed. Put a cloth on your baby's tummy until you redress him.
- **Startled**—Your baby may move suddenly, startle, and cry. Wrapping a blanket securely around her and holding her firmly may calm her.



- **Pain**—Your baby may be uncomfortable because he is in pain. Perhaps a pin or a sharp tag or zipper is pricking him, or a thread or adult hair has become wrapped around one of his toes or fingers. Check for anything that might be causing your baby pain.
- **Colic**—Some babies have colic and cry often for long periods of time. Talk to your primary care health professional about ways to comfort a baby with colic.
- **Illness**—For some babies, crying may be one of the first signs of illness. A fever, infection, or some other illness can make your baby cry. If you cannot find a cause for your baby’s crying, and usual methods of soothing your baby do not work, contact your primary care health professional.

Ways to Soothe the Crying Infant

- **Rhythmic pat**—Pat your baby’s back or bottom. A heartbeat pattern or any other rhythmical pattern may be soothing.
- **Monotone hum**—Hum a monotone note over and over again. You might even find your baby humming it with you.
- **Gentle stroke**—Gently and repetitively stroke one of your baby’s body parts. Experiment with stroking directly against the skin and with stroking clothing on an arm, a leg, the neck, behind the ears, the bottoms of feet, or the back.
- **Neck cradle**—Cradle your baby’s face between your cheek and shoulder. Sway or rock your baby while you hold him this way. Walking with the baby will add a rocking motion.
- **Rhythmic motion**—Rocking your baby or walking her in a stroller may soothe her.
- **Skin contact**—Remove your baby’s shirt and lay him against your bare skin inside a robe or under a blanket.
- **Lying together**—Lie down with your baby on the couch, bed, or floor. Try positioning yourself and your baby both belly-to-belly and “spoon” style with baby’s back to your belly.
- **Swaddling**—Wrap your baby swaddle-style in a blanket. Experiment with having your baby’s arms inside and outside the blanket.
- **White noise**—Some babies are comforted by external monotonous noises such as vacuum cleaners, washing machines, dishwashers, or the sound of running water. If your baby is soothed by these types of white noise, try making a tape of the sound to cut down on your power bill.
- **Soothing bath**—Water is comforting to many babies. A warm bath might be just what it takes to help soothe your baby.



- Infant slings and front-pack carriers—Slings and front-pack carriers allow you to comfort your baby and keep her close to you while you go about some of your daily tasks.
- Distraction—Try refocusing your baby’s attention on a toy or other interesting object.

SUGGESTED READING

Peinkofer J. 2000. 101 Ways to Soothe a Crying Baby. Contemporary Books. Available in book stores or on the Web at <http://www.sootheababy.com>.

This handout adapted from the BRIGHT FUTURES TOOL FOR FAMILIES.

