

Crying Babies: Causes and Solutions for Parents



Highlights

The only way young babies know how to communicate is through crying. Babies may cry because they are hungry, tired, uncomfortable, or need a cuddle. Most babies like to be picked up and held when they're crying. Never shake or hurt your baby - or become angry with your baby. If you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed by your baby's crying, place them in their cot, walk away, and return when you're feeling calm.

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Why Is My Baby Crying?

Babies cry for many reasons. Sometimes it's obvious they're hungry, tired, or

even bored; at other times, it can be less clear what they want. Babies don't cry to annoy you - they are communicating a need in the only way they know how.

The only way young babies know how to communicate is through crying. In the first 3 months of life, crying helps to build a close relationship between parents and their baby, as your baby learns how to call you when they need something.

The pitch and intensity of your baby's cry are designed by nature to get you to respond quickly. As they mature, they'll learn other ways to tell you what they need. Be patient as you learn what your baby's cries might mean and what they need.

In very young babies, a couple of hours of crying in the late afternoons and evening is common.

Your baby's individual personality and temperament influence their behavior. Although all babies are sensitive, some need a little more frequent soothing and reassurance than others.

How Baby Crying Changes Over Time

A baby's age, environment, and temperament all have an impact on their behavior. All babies go through changes in their crying patterns, and sometimes it's hard to work out why.

Babies also change their sleeping and feeding routines when they're growing through a new developmental stage. It's the same when they're unwell, teething, or experiencing separation anxiety.

In the first 3 years of life, babies are developing connections or pathways in their brain and need consistent nurturing to feel safe. This takes a lot of energy from parents, who often feel tired and sleep-deprived.

As your baby gets older, their sleep patterns will become more predictable. Newborns sleep between 14 and 17 hours of each 24-hour day. As they mature, they'll need less sleep during the day and have more continuous sleep overnight.

What Are the Most Common Reasons for Crying?

Sometimes it may be hard to know why your baby is crying. But it's helpful to be able to rule out a few of the more common causes of crying and to understand why your baby is upset.

Consider whether your baby might be:

feeling uncomfortable - try changing their nappy and checking they're not too hot or cold

hungry, tired, or have a tummy ache - overtired babies often cry loudly when they need to sleep

in need of cuddles and reassurance

not feeling well - sometimes crying is the only obvious sign that a baby is unwell

How to Soothe a Crying Baby

Most babies like to be picked up and held when they're crying. Rocking, 'shooshing', swaying, and patting can help them to settle.

Babies aged less than 3 months often respond well to being swaddled. This helps them to feel secure and supports longer sleep periods. Young babies often prefer settling in arms or with hands-on settling strategies until they learn more independent skills.

Babies often feel calm with movement, which is why going for a walk with the pram or placing them in a sling or carrier can help.

Some babies are particularly sensitive to stimuli such as noise and lights, and calm more quickly in a dark, quiet room. Others prefer some background sounds rather than a completely quiet environment.

Think about your own emotions when your baby is crying. Many parents say their baby 'picks up' on what else is going on in the household, especially when there's tension. Try to be mindful and focus on staying calm and reassuring when your baby's crying.

How to Prevent Excessive Crying

Follow a regular settling routine - this will help your baby to feel secure and learn it's time for sleep. A gentle, predictable wind-down period helps babies transition from being active to becoming calm. Learning your baby's tired signs, such as yawning, rubbing their eyes, grizzling, and fussiness, are common signs they need to sleep.

Try to separate your baby's feeding and settling times. It's normal and very common for young babies to go to sleep when they're feeding and being held. Missing their 'sleep window' can lead to overtiredness, making it more difficult to settle.

Make sure they're comfortable, warmly dressed (but not too hot), and have a dry nappy. The best time for most babies to settle is after feeding. Try to place your baby in their cot when they're still drowsy, rather than asleep in your arms.

Stay with them until they're relaxed and drifting off to sleep. Support your baby so they learn how to settle independently, without always needing your help.

Tools and Assistance

If you're feeling overwhelmed or unsure, there are plenty of resources and support networks available. Consider the following options:

Family and friends - Don't hesitate to ask for help when you need it, whether it's a short break or support during tough moments.

Parenting support groups - Join online forums or local groups where you can share experiences and tips with other parents.

Consult a pediatrician - If you're concerned about the amount of crying or other health issues, seeking advice from your baby's pediatrician can help.

Baby care classes - Many hospitals and community centers offer classes on soothing techniques and baby care.

