The Crying Infant
Physician Script

Being a parent can be one of the most satisfying jobs we will do. It can also be one of the hardest. One of the first challenges parents face is how to deal with a crying baby. Crying is a normal, everyday event in the lives of most babies. Since they can't talk right away, crying is the only way babies have to communicate that they need something. But even though we know crying is natural, it can still be stressful and upsetting.

All infants cry some of the time. Some infants cry very little while others cry a great deal. Some babies cry very intensely while others whimper. Babies may differ in how they cry, but why they cry is almost always for the same general reason: they need something. Your job is to figure out why your baby is crying and what — if anything — you can do about it. Some reasons that babies cry include hunger, gas, dirty diapers, sleepiness, needing a change in position, loneliness, temperature discomfort, too much noise or stimulation, or stomach upset. In addition, children can accidentally scratch their eyes and get hair wrapped around their fingers and toes, both of which are very painful. Make sure to give your child a “once over” looking for injuries like those if crying persists. I have a handout for you that explains each those situations in more detail as well as some actions you can take for each one.

Some situations make it harder for you to understand what the baby is trying to tell you. For example, the cries of a baby who was born several months too early are sometimes harder to figure out than those of full-term babies. A baby who is sick may have a cry that is harder to understand than the cry of a healthy baby. Always call your child’s physician if you have any questions about the health of your child.

Sometimes, no matter what parents do, they cannot seem to soothe their infants. Often people call this kind of constant crying “colic.” We still don't know exactly what causes colic. Some think a colicky baby has gas, indigestion, or food allergies. It’s important to realize that you are not to blame for a baby's constant crying. It's also important to remember that babies don't cry to annoy us or because they think we are bad parents. Babies are not capable of thinking these things. Nevertheless, you are likely to find yourself feeling frustrated and angry or guilty. This tension can build to the point where you feel you are at your wit’s end. At this point there are several things you can do. First, take a break. Have someone else take care of the baby for a while if that's possible. Otherwise, put the baby in a comfortable and safe place, such as a crib, and then walk away and let the child cry while you calm down. Second, remember to tell yourself that it will not always be like this. Babies usually recover from being colicky by the time they are about 3 months old. Finally, no matter how upset you feel, do not grab or shake the baby. This will not stop the crying and it can cause severe injury or even death.

http://www.ucsfhealth.org/childrens/edu/wellBaby/crying.html
http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/H/HE-0717/
http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/healthy-baby/PR00037
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Take Home Points

Consider what your baby may be thinking:

- **I'm hungry.** Most newborns eat every few hours around the clock. Some babies become frantic when hunger strikes. To avoid such frenzy, respond to early signs of hunger. If your baby begins to gulp during the feeding, take a break.

- **I need to burp.** During and after each feeding, take time to burp your baby. But don't stop there. Your baby may need to burp between feedings as well.

- **I pooped.** For some babies, a wet or soiled diaper is a surefire way to trigger tears. Gas or indigestion may have the same effect. Check your baby's diaper often to make sure it's clean and dry.

- **I'm tired.** Tired babies are often fussy. Make sure your baby is getting enough sleep. For newborns, this often means up to 16 hours — or even more — every day.

- **I'd rather be bundled.** Some babies feel most secure in a swaddle wrap

- **I want to move.** Sometimes a rocking session or walk through the house is enough to soothe a crying baby. In other cases, a change of position is all that's needed. Keeping safety precautions in mind, try a baby swing or vibrating infant seat

- **I'm lonely.** Sometimes simply seeing you, hearing your voice or being cuddled may stop the tears. Gentle massage or light pats on the back may work, too.

- **I'm hot.** A baby who's too hot or cold is likely to be uncomfortable. Add or remove a layer of your baby's clothing as needed.

- **I want to suck on something.** Sucking is a natural reflex. For many babies, it's a comforting, soothing activity. If your baby isn't hungry, try a clean finger or pacifier.

- **I've had enough.** Too much noise, movement or visual stimulation may drive your baby to tears. Move to a calmer environment or place your baby in the crib. White noise — such as a recording of ocean waves or the monotonous sound of an electric fan or vacuum cleaner — may help your baby relax.

- **It's just that time of day.** Many babies have predictable periods of fussiness during the day. There may be little you can do but comfort your baby as the crying runs its course.

- **My tummy hurts.** If you're breast-feeding your baby, he or she may be fussier than usual after you eat spicy or gas-producing foods. Too much caffeine may be an issue as well. If you suspect a certain food is causing trouble, avoid it for several days to see if it makes a difference.

- **I am hurting.** Children can accidentally scratch their eyes and get hair wrapped around their finders and toes, both of which are very painful. Make sure to give your child a “once over” looking for injuries like those if crying persists.
What to do if they have long periods of crying.

− **Take a break.** Have someone else take care of the baby for a while if that’s possible. Otherwise, put the baby in a comfortable and safe place, such as a crib, and then walk away and let the child cry while you calm down.

− Remind yourself of the times during the day when your baby didn’t cry.

− Remember to tell yourself that it will not always be like this. Babies usually recover from being colicky by the time they are about 3 months old. Finally, no matter how upset you feel, do not grab or shake the baby. This will not stop the crying and it can cause severe injury or even death.