

Crying

Crying is the main way that young babies communicate with their world. Babies may cry when hungry, tired, when they have a wet or soiled nappy, when too hot or too cold, when in pain or sometimes for no obvious reason at all. Despite the fact that crying is a normal part of the babies' development, it can be extremely distressing for parents. Some babies cry more than others and are more difficult to comfort. This often seems to relate to the baby's temperament, which explains why some families can have one baby who is very unsettled and cries a lot then a second baby who seems much more placid from day one. Babies who cry more than average seem to be more sensitive to their environment. They often get "over stimulated" by too much activity and noise, particularly in the afternoon and evening. Such babies can be grisly and difficult to settle. The "up side" though, is that these babies are often very alert, engaging and interactive. When they get a little older (> 3 months) the unsettled grisly time will often be replaced by **sociable** interactive time.

How much crying is Normal?

Newborn babies often seem to just feed and sleep whilst in hospital, but most families find they wake up more and more once home. Time spent crying gradually increases, reaching a peak at about 6 weeks of 2-3 hours per day **on average**.

What is Colic?

Babies who cry inconsolably for more than 3 hours per day, most commonly in the late afternoon and evening, are often labeled as having "colic". This term is very confusing, as it seems to imply that something is wrong with the baby's tummy or gastrointestinal tract when in most babies this is not the case. Babies who cry commonly arch their backs, pass wind (they swallow a lot of air whilst crying) and draw up their legs. Many parents think that all these signs mean that their baby is in pain, but these are **non-specific** signs of distress. Babies crying for **any** reason (including pain, tiredness etc) will behave in the same way. The term "colic" refers to babies who cry more than 3 hours a day, for more than 3 days a week, for more than 3 weeks with **no** medical cause.

What about Reflux?

It is common and normal for young babies to bring up milk or "posit" after feeds. This is not the same as vomiting. When babies **vomit** frequently (eg more than 5 times a day) and cry a lot, doctors worry about gastro-oesophageal reflux that is bad enough to warrant tests and treatment. Gastro-oesophageal reflux is a condition where the ring of muscle at the top of the stomach doesn't work very well, allowing milk (and sometimes stomach acid) to come back up the oesophagus (swallowing pipe).

Is the crying due to milk allergy?

A small percentage of babies are intolerant to the cow's milk protein in infant formula. These babies may cry a lot after feeds vomit or have loose/mucous/blood stained poo. It is important to stress that milk protein intolerance is responsible for a very small percentage of crying problems

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(less than 5 in 100 babies), and is even less common in breast fed babies. Don't be tempted to change formula (or your diet if breast feeding) unless a trusted health professional has suggested such a change.

In summary

Crying is a normal behavior in young babies. Some babies cry more than the average 2-3 hours per day. Probably less than 5% of these babies will have a medical cause for their crying (but still should be assessed by a Doctor or Maternal and Child Health Nurse). For the other 95% there is hope! You do not have to just struggle through until the magical 3 month mark, rather you can help your baby to learn to be more settled.

Settling your baby

In the first few weeks of a baby's life many parents have concerns about erratic feeding, crying and difficulty settling their new baby. It is important to realize that many of the questions parents have about caring for their baby have no absolute right or wrong answers, rather a number of options. Babies need to be fed, loved, kept warm and changed when necessary. Beyond this, you need to choose what is right for your own baby. If things are working well for you, your baby is happy and thriving, then there is certainly no need to change things. If however, you are finding it difficult to cope, your baby is unsettled and sleeping and feeding erratically than you **can** change things.

The Feed-Play-Sleep Routine – What it is and how do I get it?

All new parents have heard about this elusive routine that babies are 'supposed' to have. In reality, many babies do not settle happily into a routine of feeding 3-4 hourly and sleeping in between – these babies may need a little help to get the hang of it! In hospital, babies tend to feed then go back to sleep. Once you are back home they often sleep less and feed more and more frequently, resulting in shorter sleeps and very exhausted parents! The good news is that you can teach your baby a more workable routine. Introducing a playtime after feeds is enjoyable for babies and parents. This will often mean that you are not trying to put an alert awake baby to sleep, but rather wait until your baby shows signs of being tired before you put him/her down for (hopefully) a good sleep, moving towards the magical 3-4 hourly feed routine!

Playtime

Playtime for new babies consists of talking/singing to him/her whilst he/she can see your face. As your baby gets older, he/she may enjoy some floor time with a baby gym, sitting in a baby chair/rocker with some interesting dangly toys, or propped in a pram outside under some trees.

Tired Signs

It is very important to put your baby down to sleep when he/she is tired but not overtired. Learning to recognize your baby's tired signs and putting him/her down at the first sign of these is one of the most important steps to developing the feed play sleep routine. Tired signs may include:

- Jerky movements
- Frowning
- Clenching fists
- Crying/grizzling

If you find it difficult to "read" your baby's tired signs, use time as a guide. At 5-6 weeks, babies are usually tired after being up for 1¹/₂ hours. At 3-4 months this may be 2 hours.

Settling to sleep routine

1. Wrap baby
2. Put baby to bed on his/her back (+/- dummy if used)
3. If baby cries or grizzles use settling techniques:
 - Rocking
 - Patting
 - Stroking
 - Jiggle bassinette

Use technique for 5 minutes before switching to new technique. Continue until baby is quiet, but not asleep. The aim is for your baby to eventually learn to fall asleep by him/herself.

4. If baby starts to cry again, wait 2 minutes before returning and starting settling techniques again.

What if my baby doesn't settle?

Learning a new pattern will take time for your baby. It is important to persist with the techniques, as picking your baby up if crying during the settling process will not help him/he to learn to sleep. Giving consistent sleep messages will help. Continue the settling techniques for 30-60 minutes. If your baby is still not settled, try one of the following:

- Carry your baby in a sling. Not only is this very soothing for your baby, it also enables you to have hands free to do other things. Often excellent for "colicky" babies.
- Take baby for a walk in the pram/ride in the car.

- Give baby a relaxation bath. Have the bath as warm as you would for yourself and deep enough so baby can float. Try baby on his/her back and on tummy with head supported. Baby may still be upset when you take him/her out but hopefully more ready to sleep.

Resettling

A common problem is babies waking after less than one hour of sleep. Some parents mistakenly believe that their baby is hungry and feed again (most babies will take some feed even if not especially hungry as the sucking brings comfort). We all have cycles of deep sleep and dreaming sleep and momentary waking in between. Mostly, as adults, we just roll over after a sleep cycle and go back to sleep without even realizing we've been awake. Babies have not learned the skill of falling asleep without some help (feeding, dummy, rocking etc) may wake after a sleep cycle (20 to 40 minutes in young babies) and not be able to resettle. **If your baby wakes under an hour after falling asleep, try to resettle**, using the techniques outlines above, for up to half an hour. This way you can teach your baby to sleep longer. The end result is usually a bay that is happier, and who feeds better, then sleeps better for the next nap.

Taking care of yourself

The first few months with a new baby can be extremely tiring both physically and emotionally. If this is your first baby both parents may often feel overwhelmed by the huge lifestyle change and responsibility. If you have a baby who is difficult to settle, this emotional roller coaster may feel even more turbulent. You, as parents, are the most important people in your new baby's life, so you must look after yourselves.

- **Accept offers of help.** Friends and family often genuinely want to help but need some direction from you as to what's needed. Bringing a meal when they come to visit the baby, putting the washing on the line, taking the baby for a walk so you can rest. All these may lighten your load. Accepting help does not mean that you have to accept all the advice others have about how to manage your baby.
- Make your sleep/rest a priority. A new baby is a 24 hour a day job. You need to have a sleep or at least a rest during the day whilst your baby is still waking for night feeds. When your baby settles – head straight for your rest – don't delay to do household chores etc or baby will be up again and you will have missed out! Plan to do most of your housework before midday as crying and fussing is often worse in the afternoon.
- Eat well and drink plenty of fluids (especially if breastfeeding). You won't have much time to cook so have plenty of healthy snacks on hand. Fruit and vegetables, muesli bars, yoghurt etc. Take advantage of local shops that deliver or shop on the internet.
- If you are feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope, ask for extra help from a trusted friend or family member and talk to your Doctor or Maternal and Child Health Nurse about the way you are feeling.