

UNDERSTANDING AND COPING WITH YOUR BABY'S CRYING

Parents understand that their baby will cry sometimes. We know that babies cry to tell us they are hungry, tired, have gas pains, need to burp or need a cuddle. So it's a bit of a shock when our baby keeps on crying, even when we've tried everything possible to comfort her. And sometimes it goes on and on for hours. Some have called this 'inconsolable crying'.

This kind of crying isn't easy to understand. It can come and go for no reason, last for 30-40 minutes or longer (sometimes adding up to hours each day!) and look like the baby is in pain.

This happens often, though, and is quite normal. Crying in young babies follows a pretty standard pattern. In all healthy babies, crying begins to increase at about 2 weeks of age. Each week, babies cry more and more, reaching a peak at about 6-8 weeks. After this, crying gradually improves. By the time a baby is 4-5 months old, this 'difficult to comfort' crying is much better.

Things will get better! But in the meantime, there are a number of things parents can do to get through this trying period. While these things may help, nothing works all of the time.



Check with your doctor or midwife.

If you've been having trouble soothing your baby's crying, the first thing to do is to check with your doctor or midwife to make sure your baby is healthy.



Check with your baby.

 When your baby cries, check if they are:

- Hungry or wet
- Too warm or too cold
- Gassy or need burping
- Lying in an uncomfortable position
- Bored and need a change of position, activity, or place
- Overwhelmed (things are too loud, too bright, or there is too much going on)



Comfort your baby.

 If your baby is still crying, you can try other ways to comfort them, like:

- Gently rocking, walking, or bouncing your baby
- Cuddling your baby "skin to skin"
- Giving your baby a bath
- Going for a walk with your baby in a carrier or stroller
- Massaging your baby's back, arms, or legs
- Smiling, singing, humming or talking quietly
- Creating white noise (with a fan or vacuum)
- Taking your baby for a ride in the car
- Giving a pacifier once breastfeeding is established

Did you know?

Babies don't cry 'on purpose'! Babies who spend a lot of time being carried close to a parent's body cry less.

Most of the time, crying is not caused by feeding issues. Don't stop breastfeeding because you think it will help the crying. Speak with your doctor, nurse or midwife first.

'Colic' isn't a disease. It just describes babies who cry a lot. Healthy babies can cry a lot, and there isn't anything wrong with them. Or with you.

You won't spoil your baby by picking her up and comforting her when she's crying. You can't spoil a baby with love and comfort!

Just because your baby cries a lot now, doesn't mean he'll cry a lot or be difficult when he's older.

Handling frustration and anger

A crying baby can be very frustrating, especially for sleep-deprived parents. There is nothing wrong with you. If you feel really frustrated when your baby has been crying, put her down in a safe place (a crib is a good choice) for a few minutes. Never shake or hurt a baby. Take a break, and come back when you're a little calmer. It's a good idea to make a plan for what to do when things are difficult.

A plan could look something like this:

1. Put baby in his crib and walk away for a few minutes.
2. Check on baby every few minutes.
3. Do something to make myself feel better (listen to music, have a snack, stretch).
4. Call for back-up (partner, friend, neighbour, family).
5. Pick baby up only when I'm calmer.

It's also important that anyone caring for your baby has a plan to handle their frustration when your baby cries. **Make sure that anyone who cares for your baby:**

- Is comfortable caring for babies
- Has some experience with babies
- Knows how to comfort a crying baby
- Can handle the frustration that goes along with looking after babies
- Understands that crying is normal, and that the baby is not crying 'on purpose'
- Knows what to do when they are feeling frustrated

Parents need soothing too! Some ways to calm yourself:

- Take some long, slow, deep breaths
- Listen to music with earphones (if you have to, you can even do this while holding your baby)
- Talk with supportive friends and family members
- Remind yourself that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, this period of intense crying will not last forever.

While your baby is sleeping, or if someone is looking after your baby for you:

- Take a warm bath
- Watch a favourite TV show-especially something that makes you laugh!
- Break a sweat. Do some push-ups, sit-ups, or exercise along with a video. Get a yoga book and try a few poses. Or, try a yoga class.
- Grab a nap. Even 20 or 30 minutes can make a big difference.
- Spend some time on a hobby or activity that you really enjoy.

Parents can also have other stresses in their lives, aside from looking after a new baby. Parents might be struggling with financial problems, conflict with a spouse, mental health problems or an addiction. Reach out for the support you need. Speak with your family doctor, pediatrician, or start with some of the resources listed above.

In a crisis? Child, Youth and Family Crisis Line for Eastern Ontario, 613-260-2360 or toll-free, 1-877-377-7775

Helpful resources

Ottawa Public Health
613-580-6744
Toll free: 1-866-426-8885

Eastern Ontario Health Unit
613-933-1375 or 1 800 267-7120 and
ask for the Health Line

**Renfrew County and District Health
Unit Health Info Line**
613-735-8666 or
1-800-267-1097 ext. 666

Family Service Centre of Ottawa
613-725-3601
www.familyservicesottawa.org

Catholic Family Services
613-233-8418,
www.cfssfc-ottawa.org

Jewish Family Services
613-722-2225,
www.jfsottawa.com

The Period of Purple Crying
<http://www.purplecrying.info/>