

The Most Common Reasons Babies Cry and How to Soothe Them

Having a new baby can be a wonderful time, but it can also be challenging. Babies cry, sometimes a lot. It's important to remember that there are things that you can do to try to help ease the crying. Some suggestions are listed below. Some may work on some days and not on others – try them and see what your baby responds to. Also, check out additional resources on the Period of Purple Crying website at www.purplecrying.info.

Remember: the crying won't last forever; you and your baby will get through this!

1. Hunger

Learning to recognize the signs of hunger will help you start your baby's feedings before the crying stage. Some signs to watch for in newborns: fussing, smacking of lips, rooting (a newborn reflex that causes babies to turn their head toward your hand when you stroke their cheek), and putting their hands to their mouth.

2. A dirty diaper

Some babies let you know right away when they need to be changed.

3. Needs sleep

Instead of nodding off, babies may fuss and cry, especially if they are overly tired.

4. Wants to be held

Babies need a lot of cuddling. They like to see their parents' faces, hear their voices, and listen to their heartbeats, and can even detect their unique smell. Crying can be their way of asking to be held close.

5. Tummy troubles (e.g. gas, colic, allergy to cow's milk protein and/or other foods)

If your baby often fusses and cries right after being fed, he may be feeling some sort of tummy pain. If you suspect gas, try something simple to eliminate it such as putting him on his back, holding his feet, and moving his legs in a gentle bicycling motion. If you think your baby may be sensitive to something in your breast milk or in the formula, consult your physician.

6. Needs to burp

If your baby cries after a feeding, a good burp may be all he needs. Babies swallow air when they breastfeed or suck from a bottle, and if the air isn't released it may cause some discomfort.

7. Too cold or too hot

When your baby feels chilly, such as when you remove his clothes to change a diaper or clean his bottom with a cold wipe, he may protest by crying. Likewise, when baby is too hot, he may protest by crying. Signs that your baby might be overly warm include damp hair, sweaty back or chest and red ears and/or face. Taking off a layer of clothing may help.

8. Something small

Babies can be troubled by something as hard to spot as a hair wrapped tightly around a tiny toe or finger, cutting off circulation. Some babies are extra sensitive to things like scratchy clothing tags or fabric and they can be very picky about subtleties ranging from the position they are held in to the bottle you offer.

9. Teething

Teething can be painful as each new tooth pushes through tender young gums. Some babies suffer more than others, but all are likely to be fussy and tearful at some point along the way. Try feeling your baby's gums with your finger. You may be surprised to discover the hard nub of a baby tooth on its way in. On average, the first tooth breaks through between 4 and 7 months, but it can happen earlier.

10. Wants less stimulation

Babies learn from the stimulation of the world around them, but sometimes they have a hard time processing it all — the lights, the noise, being passed from hand to hand. Crying can be a baby's way of saying, "I've had enough." Many newborns enjoy being swaddled. It seems to make them feel more secure when the world gets overwhelming. If your baby's too old for swaddling or doesn't like it, try retreating to a serene spot and letting your baby vent for a while.

11. Wants more stimulation

Some babies may be outgoing and eager to see the world and often the only way to stop the crying is to stay active. Try "wearing" your baby in a sling, front carrier, or backpack. Plan plenty of activities. Hang out with other parents with babies. Go on outings to kid-friendly places such as the zoo.

12. Not feeling well

If you have met your baby's basic needs and comforted him and he is still crying, he could be coming down with something. You may want to check his temperature to rule out a fever and be alert for other signs of illness. The cry of a sick baby tends to be distinct from one caused by hunger or frustration. If your baby's crying "just doesn't sound right," trust your instincts and call or see a doctor.

Other things you can try to soothe your baby...

- Sucking can steady a baby's heart rate, relax his stomach, and calm flailing limbs. Offer your baby a pacifier or a finger to suck on.
- Try playing music, singing a lullaby or your favorite song, and dancing around the room. Experiment with different kinds of music to see what your baby responds to.
- The sound of a vacuum cleaner or kitchen exhaust fan might not seem very soothing, but many babies are calmed by a steady flow of "white noise" that blocks out other noises – much like the constant whoosh of bodily sounds they heard in the womb.
- Sometimes simply opening the front or back door and stepping outside with your baby stops the crying instantly. If it works, savor the moment. Look around, look up at the sky, and talk to your baby about the world around your home.
- Like fresh air, a bath in warm water can soothe and put a stop to your baby's tears. Make sure that baby is properly supervised at all times while in the tub.
- For a change from a bath, try holding your baby in your arms under a gently running shower. Just make sure your shower is slip-proof and the water temperature is not too warm.
- The movement involved in being carried in your arms or a carrier may be enough. Other ways to get your baby in motion: a rocking chair, swing, or bouncy seat or a ride in the stroller or car.
- Most babies love to be touched, so a massage might be just the thing. Don't worry about not knowing the perfect movements — as long as they are gentle and slow, they should bring comfort.

How to cope

- An inconsolable baby is a tough trial for a new parent. It is enough to make you cry. Go ahead.
- Share baby care with your partner. Have a friend or relative take over for you once in a while so you can take a peaceful walk or a refreshing shower.
- If you find yourself becoming angry or frustrated with your baby, take a deep breath and gently lay her on her back in her crib. Then call a friend or a relative to come and stay with your baby while you calm down.
- You may not be able to keep your baby from crying. In fact, it is possible that crying is exactly what she needs to do, and you can best help her by respecting and accepting that. Continue to hold her, rock her, whisper to her – and let her cry, all the while assured of your love.

Adapted from "12 Reasons Babies Cry and How to Soothe Them" by Dana Dubinky, "What to do When Your Baby Cries for 'No Reason'", and "Colic: How to Cope" from www.babycenter.com