Soothing a crying baby

All babies cry, and some more than others. Crying is your baby's way of telling you they need comfort and care.

Sometimes it's easy to work out what they want, and sometimes it's not.

The most common reasons for crying are:

* hunger
* a dirty or wet nappy
* tiredness
* wanting a cuddle
* wind
* being too hot or too cold
* boredom
* overstimulation

There may be times of the day when your baby tends to cry a lot and cannot be comforted. Early evening is the most common time for this to happen.

This can be hard for you, as it's often the time when you're most tired and least able to cope.

The amount babies cry tends to peak when they're around 4 to 8 weeks old, then gradually tail off.

How to calm a crying baby

Try some of the following ways to comfort your baby. Some may work better than others:

* If you're breastfeeding, let your baby suckle at your breast.
* Having some gentle noise in the background may help distract your baby.
* Some older babies like to use a bit of cloth or a blanket as a comforter.
* Hold your baby or put them in a sling so they're close to you. Move about gently, sway and dance, talk to them and sing.
* Rock your baby backwards and forwards in the pram, or go out for a walk or a drive. But limit how long your baby sleeps in a car seat to up to 30 minutes for newborns and up to 2 hours for babies. Even if they wake up again when you stop, at least you'll have had a break.
* Find something for them to listen to or look at. This could be music on the radio, a CD, a rattle, or a mobile above the cot.
* Try stroking your baby's back firmly and rhythmically, holding them against you or lying face downwards on your lap.
* Undress your baby and massage them gently and firmly. Avoid using any oils or lotions until your baby's at least a month old. Talk soothingly as you do it and keep the room warm enough. Some health centres and clinics run baby massage courses. For information, ask your midwife or health visitor.
* Try a warm bath. This calms some babies instantly, but makes others cry even more.
* Sometimes too much rocking and singing can keep your baby awake. You might find lying them down after a feed will help.
* Ask your health visitor for advice.

Crying during feeds

Some babies cry and seem unsettled around the time of a feed. If you're breastfeeding, you may find that improving your baby's positioning and attachment helps them settle.

Crying during feeds can sometimes be a symptom of reflux, a common condition where babies bring back milk after feeds. Speak to your health visitor or GP for more information and advice.

Crying and illness

If your baby's crying constantly and you cannot console or distract them, or the cry does not sound like their normal cry, it can be a sign they're ill. Or they may be ill if they're crying and have other symptoms, such as a high temperature.

Call 112 and ask for an ambulance if your baby:

* has a fit (seizure or convulsion)
* has blue, mottled, ashen (grey) or very pale skin
* is unresponsive, floppy or not waking up as easily as usual
* breathes rapidly or makes a throaty noise while breathing, or seems to be working hard to breathe, perhaps sucking in their stomach under their ribcage
* is being violently sick a lot (projectile vomiting)
* has a high temperature, but their hands and feet feel cold
* has a spotty purple-red rash anywhere on the body – this could be a sign of meningitis

Trust your instincts. You know what's different or worrying behaviour in your baby.

Getting help with a crying baby

For example, this might be after every feed or during the evening. This can help your health visitor or GP to work out if there's a particular cause for the crying.

Keeping a record can also help you identify the times when you need extra support. You could think about possible changes to your routine.

There may be times when you're so tired and angry you feel like you cannot take any more. This happens to a lot of parents, so do not be ashamed to ask for help.

If you do not have anyone who can take care of your baby for a short time and the crying is making you stressed, put your baby in their cot or pram, make sure they're safe, close the door, go into another room and try to calm yourself down.

Set a time limit – for example, 10 minutes – then go back.

Never shake your baby

No matter how frustrated you feel, you must never shake your baby. Shaking moves their head violently and can cause brain damage.