



[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → Fussy or irritable child

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Fussy or irritable child

Young children who cannot talk yet will let you know when something is wrong by acting fussy or irritable. If your child is fussier than usual, it could be a sign that something is wrong.

Causes

It is normal for children to get fussy or whiny sometimes. There are lots of reasons why children get fussy:

- Lack of sleep
- Hunger
- Frustration
- Fight with a sibling
- Being too hot or too cold

Your child also may be worried about something. Ask yourself if there has been stress, sadness, or anger in your home. Young children are sensitive to stress at home, and to the mood of their parents or caregivers.

A baby who cries for longer than 3 hours a day might have colic. Learn ways that you can help your baby with colic.

Many common childhood illnesses can cause a child to be fussy. Most illnesses are easily treated. They include:

- Ear infection
- Teething or a toothache
- Cold or flu
- Bladder infection
- Stomach pain or stomach flu
- Headache
- Constipation
- Pinworm
- Poor sleep patterns

Although less common, your child's fussiness may be an early sign of a more serious problem, such as:

- Diabetes, asthma, anemia (low blood count), or other health problem
- Serious infections, such as an infection in the lungs, kidneys, or around the brain
- Head injury that you did not see happen
- Hearing or speech problems
- Autism or abnormal brain development (if fussiness does not go away and becomes more severe)
- Depression or other mental health problems
- Pain, such as headache or stomach ache

Home Care

Soothe your child as you would normally. Try rocking, cuddling, talking, or doing things your child finds calming.

Address other factors that may be causing fussiness:

- Poor sleep patterns
- Noise or stimulation around your child (too much or too little can be a problem)
- Stress around the home
- Irregular day-to-day schedule

Using your parenting skills, you should be able to calm your child and make things better. Getting your child on a regular eating, sleeping, and daily schedule can also help.

When to Contact a Medical Professional

As a parent, you know your child's usual behavior. If your child is more irritable than usual and cannot be comforted, contact your child's health care provider.

Watch for and report other symptoms, such as:

- Belly pain
- Crying that persists
- Fast breathing
- Fever
- Poor appetite
- Racing heartbeat
- Rash
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Sweating

What to Expect at Your Office Visit

Your child's provider will work with you to learn why your child is irritable. During the office visit, the provider will:

- Ask questions and take a history

- Examine your child
- Order lab tests, if needed

Alternative Names

Inconsolability; Irritability

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