

# Crying

Every baby cries, particularly during the first few weeks of life. Babies can't talk so they use crying as a way of expressing themselves and communicating their needs.



Sometimes, it can be hard to work out why your baby is crying. Some common causes include:

- Hunger
- Thirst
- A wet or soiled nappy
- Tiredness
- Trapped wind
- Being too hot or too cold
- Loneliness (wanting bodily contact or attention)
- Boredom
- Being uncomfortable, for example if their clothing or covers are too tight
- Being over-stimulated or frightened, for example if there is too much noise or activity
- Colic (see below)

Finding out why a baby is crying is often a matter of going through all the possible options. If there is no obvious cause for the crying, a number of techniques can be used to soothe a crying baby, like listening to music or going for a walk.

## Colic

Colic is fairly common in newborn babies and usually begins a few weeks after birth. Colic causes excessive crying. Your baby will sound miserable and distressed, and they can be very difficult to calm. Another symptom of colic is a change in posture. For example, your baby may draw their knees up towards their chest. The cause of colic is unknown. Some research suggests that colic may happen because your baby's digestive system is still developing during the first few weeks of life. Colic will usually go away after a few months. There are medicines available through your GP or pharmacy, but there is little evidence that they are effective. Speak to your health visitor if you are worried.



For more information, help and support go to [www.choosewellmanchester.org.uk](http://www.choosewellmanchester.org.uk) or visit NHS Choices at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

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## Coping with crying

When your baby cries, it can be stressful for both you and your child. Sometimes, you will know what their crying means and you can take appropriate action. On other occasions, you may find it more difficult to stop your baby crying. The first step is to rule out all the common causes of crying, listed above. If feeding or nappy changing does not help, there are a number of other things that you can try to soothe your baby:



It can be stressful and exhausting when your baby cries, particularly if your sleep is frequently disturbed. If you have tried your best to comfort your baby and are confident that their crying or behaviour does not seem unusual, it is fine to leave your baby for a few minutes. Make sure that your baby is safely in their crib or cot and then go into another room for 10 minutes and try to relax. Although it may seem difficult, it is still important that you have time to yourself when you are bringing up a baby. Where possible, ask a trusted family member or friend to help you out, even if it is just for an hour or so. This will give you time away from the stress of the situation and will help you return in a more relaxed state of mind.

### Get into a routine

Avoid over-stimulating your baby with too much activity or new experiences. This can make them restless and more prone to crying. Instead, introduce a routine for your baby, like a regular evening bath time and a quiet bedtime. This will help reassure your baby and may encourage them to cry less.

### Dealing with stress and anger

Take a break if your baby's crying is making you feel stressed to the point where you are getting angry or are about to lose your temper. Never shake your baby. This moves their head violently and can cause bleeding and brain damage. If you need support, contact your health visitor or GP, or the charity Cry-sis, which helps families with crying, sleepless and demanding babies. Call the Cry-sis helpline on 08451 228 669. The helpline is open seven days a week from 9am to 10pm. You can also call the NSPCC Child Protection helpline on 0808 800 5000. They have trained counsellors who can offer support and advice to parents and carers. The phone line is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### When to seek medical advice

Within a few weeks, you will often start to recognise what your baby's crying means. If you are concerned about the way that your baby is crying or if their crying seems unusual, call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47. Your baby's cry can sometimes be a sign that they are unwell. Always trust your instincts. If you think that your baby is unwell, look for other signs and symptoms.

- Keep your baby close. Try using a baby carrier or sling so that you can maintain bodily contact or place your baby naked on your naked chest and cuddle them (as in skin to skin contact)
- If your baby is not breastfed and regularly uses one, offering a dummy may help to soothe them
- Play your baby some music. Try playing some soothing, relaxing music or singing a song or lullaby. Some babies like background noise, like a washing machine or vacuum cleaner
- Give your baby a bath. A warm bath can often soothe a crying baby, but it can make others cry more. Always check the temperature of the water before you put your baby in
- Move your baby around. Gently rocking or bouncing your baby may help
- Take your baby out, for example in the car or in their pram. Lots of babies like to sleep in cars and even if they wake up again when you stop, at least you will have had a break
- Get some fresh air. This can help you both as you will be less stressed and it may help soothe your baby
- Find something for your baby to look at, like a rattle or mobile hanging above their cot
- Try stroking your baby's back firmly and rhythmically while holding them against you or laying them face down on your lap. You could also undress your baby and gently massage them with baby oil. Talk softly as you do it and keep the room



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# What to do next...



## Choose care at home if...

- Your baby's crying is normal for them
- Your baby is crying more than usual and won't settle. If in doubt, contact NHS Direct on **0845 46 47**.



## Choose your Pharmacist, health visitor or GP if...

- Your baby has a high temperature (fever) of 38°C (100.4°F) or above if they are less than three months old, or 39°C (102.2°F) or above if they are between three and six months old (call your GP or GP out-of-hours service)
- Your baby's crying seems abnormal, for example if it is a very high-pitched cry or a whimper. Crying can sometimes be a sign that a baby is unwell
- Your baby has a weak, high-pitched, continuous cry
- Your baby seems floppy when you pick them up
- Your baby takes less than half of their usual amount of fluids, passes much less urine than usual, vomits green fluid or passes blood in their faeces (poo)



## Call 999 A&E if...

- Your baby has a high temperature but their hands and feet feel cold
- Your baby has a bulging fontanelle (the soft spot at the top of a baby's head)
- Your baby has a fit (seizure)
- Your baby turns blue, blotchy or very pale
- Your baby has a stiff neck
- Has breathing problems, like breathing fast or grunting while breathing, or they seem to be working harder than usual to breathe (for example, sucking in under the ribcage)
- Your baby has a spotty, purple-red rash anywhere on their body (this could be sign of meningitis, which is a serious infection)



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