

Your baby won't stop crying?

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Your baby won't stop crying. Does this sound familiar? Even though we know it is normal for a baby to cry, it can still be upsetting and frustrating too, as we don't know what to expect. Since babies can't talk, crying is the only way they can communicate.

Babies cry for many reasons, such as hunger, a need for a diaper change, a need to be cuddled or comforted, illness, boredom, or over-stimulation. Try to remember that your baby is not crying to punish you but is trying to say something to you. All babies go through stages of crying and children follow the same progression everywhere in the world.

Babies often cry shortly after birth, then a little less for one or two weeks. The crying usually peaks around two months and then starts to decrease gradually by three to four months.

Healthy babies may cry for up to a total of two to three hours a day. If you can determine what the baby needs and provide it, the crying will usually stop. You may not be able to stop a baby from crying completely, but you can alter him or her to some degree. All babies have periods of inconsolable crying, but some babies cry more frequently and for longer periods.

You can reduce crying by 50 per cent by increasing the amount of contact through carrying, comforting or talking to your baby. The number one reason a baby is shaken is inconsolable crying. Responding promptly to your baby's cries is not going to spoil him. According to Dr H. Karp, the five Ss of calming a crying baby are swaddling, sucking, shushing, side-lying and swinging.

Other suggestions to calm a crying baby:

- Pat the baby's back or stroke his head.

- Rock the baby in a rocking chair/cradle, or use a baby swing.
- Take the baby for a ride in the car seat.
- Let the baby listen to a previously recorded “white noise” such as a static radio, a hair dryer, an electric shaver, a clothes dryer or a vacuum cleaner.
- Walk outdoors with your baby.
- Try a pacifier or help your baby find her thumb to suck on.
- Carry your baby around in a carrying pouch or move with the baby in a soothing or rhythmic way.

Even if you follow all of these techniques, there are some babies who will not stop crying and are often irritable or cranky. These babies follow the same crying progression, but at a higher level of intensity. All babies will have times when their crying resists calming. Staying calm yourself is just as important as trying to stop the baby’s crying. Positive parenting makes a difference!

Ask for help

Sometimes it is impossible to stop a baby from crying. You can hold, comfort, walk and talk with him to try to soothe him, but without success. It is okay to put the baby down in a safe place, such as the crib, and to go into another room when you feel frustrated and impatient. Letting your baby cry for a few minutes is not harmful.

Tips to parents

- If your baby has a tendency to cry often, make arrangements for someone you trust to relieve you regularly, so that you are able to rest.
- Set up a relief plan. Telephone or talk to a trustworthy person when you are no longer able to cope with your baby’s crying.
- Discuss your situation with a friend, family member or health care professional.
- If you are sure that there is no particular problem, yet your child continues to cry, try to keep calm. If you think you are losing your cool, stop! Put your baby safely in his crib and leave the room for 15 minutes. Breathe slowly. Do not go back to

your baby until you have regained your self-control. It is safer for the baby to be alone in her crib than to be in your arms when you are exhausted and losing your cool.

- NEVER, under any circumstances, shake or hurt your baby just because he cries. You could cause serious and irreversible brain damage, and even death.
- Know your babysitter. Never leave your baby with someone you do not trust or who reacts abruptly or violently. A crying infant can be frustrating for someone who is babysitting. Warn them never to shake your baby. Inform them of your back-up relief plan.

What to expect

At certain stages, infants and children are more prone to crying. Babies who are a few months of age, and toddlers, still cry often and the noise can be very stressful. The difference is that you are better able to interpret the tears as they grow older, even if you cannot always soothe them.

Persistent crying is the most common reason that a person shakes a baby. Two out of three people cannot tolerate a baby's crying for more than 30 minutes. Some stages in a child's development can test an adult's patience, such as temper tantrums, resistance to toilet training, colic, illness, and normal negativity.

How to manage stress

Stress is a common enemy today and contributes to a lot of difficulties. It can cause us to lose control and do things that we may regret for the rest of our lives, such as shaking an infant.

Here are a few tips that you can try to reduce stress:

- Take some time for yourself;
- write down your thoughts in a personal journal;
- talk to someone;
- do not try to do more than is possible in one day;
- exercise regularly;

- use techniques such as taking a walk, doing yoga or relaxation exercises, to reduce stress levels;
- have fun, laugh and enjoy yourself as much as possible, and
- seek professional help if necessary.

For more information, call Ottawa Public Health Information at 613-580-6744, TTY: 613- 580-9656 or visit www.ottawa.ca/health.

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