



## American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

### Crying

Crying serves several useful purposes for your baby. It gives him a way to call for help when he's hungry or uncomfortable. It helps him shut out sights, sounds and other sensations that are too intense to suit him. And it helps him release tension.

You may notice that your baby has fussy periods throughout the day, even though he's not hungry, uncomfortable or tired. Nothing you do at these times will console him, but right after these spells, he may seem more alert than before and shortly thereafter may sleep more deeply than usual. This kind of fussy crying seems to help babies get rid of excess energy so they can return to a more contented state.

#### Responding to Your Baby's Cries

Pay close attention to your baby's different cries, and you'll soon be able to tell when he needs to be picked up, consoled or tended to, and when he is better off left alone. You may even be able to identify his specific needs by the way he cries. For instance, a hungry cry is usually short and low-pitched, and it rises and falls. An angry cry tends to be more turbulent. A cry of pain or distress generally comes on suddenly and loudly with a long, high-pitched shriek followed by a long pause and then a flat wail. The "leave-me-alone" cry is usually similar to a hunger cry. It won't take long before you have a pretty good idea of what your baby's cries are trying to tell you.

Sometimes different types of cries overlap. For example, newborns generally wake up hungry and crying for food. If you're not quick to respond, your baby's hunger cry may give way to a wail of rage. You'll hear the difference. As your baby matures his cries will become stronger, louder more insistent. They'll also begin to vary more, as if to convey different needs and desires.

The best way to handle crying is to respond promptly to your infant whenever he cries during his first few months. You cannot spoil a young baby by giving him attention; and if you answer his calls for help, he'll cry less overall.

#### Consoling Techniques

When responding to your child's cries, try to meet his most pressing need first. If he's cold and hungry and his diaper is wet, warm him up, change his diaper and then feed him. If there's a shrieking or panicked quality to the cry, you should consider the possibility that a diaper pin is open or a strand of hair is caught around a finger or toe. If he's warm, dry, and well fed but

nothing is working to stop the crying, try the following consoling techniques to find the ones that work best for your baby:

- Rocking, either in a rocking chair or in your arms as you sway from side to side
- Gently stroking his head or patting his back or chest
- Swaddling (wrapping the baby snugly in a receiving blanket)
- Singing or talking
- Playing soft music
- Walking him in your arms, a stroller or a carriage
- Riding in the car
- Rhythmic noise and vibration
- Burping him to relieve any trapped gas bubbles
- Warm baths (Most babies like this, but not all.)

Sometimes, if all else fails, the best approach is simply to leave the baby alone. Many babies cannot fall asleep without crying and will go to sleep more quickly if left to cry for a while. The crying shouldn't last long if the child is truly tired.

### **When Your Baby Is Inconsolable**

If your baby is inconsolable no matter what you do, he may be sick. Check his temperature. If it is over 100 degrees Fahrenheit (rectally), he could have an infection. Contact your pediatrician.

The more relaxed you remain, the easier it will be to console your child. Even very young babies are sensitive to tension around them and react to it by crying. Listening to a wailing newborn can be agonizing, but letting your frustration turn to anger or panic will only intensify your infant's screams. If you start to feel that you can't handle the situation, get help from another family member or a friend. Not only will this give you needed relief, but a new face can sometimes calm your baby when all your own tricks are spent. No matter how impatient or angry you feel, do not shake the baby. Shaking an infant hard can cause blindness, brain damage or even death.

Above all, don't take your newborn's crying personally. He's not crying because you're a bad parent or because he doesn't like you. All babies cry, often without any apparent cause. Newborns routinely cry a total of one to four hours a day. It's part of adjusting to this strange new life outside the womb.

No mother can console her child every time he cries, so don't expect to be a miracle worker with your baby. Instead, take a realistic approach to the situation, line up some help, get plenty of rest and enjoy all those wondrous moments with your child.