

Crying and Colic

When your baby is fussy

This handout explains why babies cry and what parents can do to help. It also explains the difference between normal fussiness and colic.

All Crying Is a Call for Help

It is normal for a baby to cry. Crying is one way that babies communicate with their parents. When a baby cries, it means there is some problem that needs fixing.

Why do babies cry?

Babies may cry because they are:

- **In pain.** They may have gas.
- **Feeling discomfort.** They may be hungry, wet, or cold.
- **Overtired.** They may be overexcited and cannot sleep.
- **Sick.** They may have a fever, rash, jaundice, or an infection.

Sometimes when babies cry, there does not seem to be a reason. This crying may be a way for them to release tension. Or, it may be *colic*.

How do I know what to do when my baby cries?

It is natural for you to want to find out why your baby is crying and to try to fix the problem. Helping your baby stop crying helps you feel like a good parent.

You will end up trying different things as you learn about your baby's needs. Be patient. When you find something that works, try it first the next time.



Babies cry for many reasons.

Why Babies Are Fussy

Most babies get fussy as they adapt to being in the world. A newborn's nervous system is not yet fully formed. It is hard for a baby to take in all the sights, sounds, and smells in its new world.

By the end of the day, a baby's nervous system may be overloaded. They may have shorter feeding and sleeping periods. Tension can build up until the baby finally needs to "blow off steam" by being fussy.

Evening Fussiness

Between 3 and 12 weeks, most babies become very fussy in the late afternoon and evening. It can be hard to get them to stop crying.

Doctors used to call this fussiness "colic." But, it is a normal phase for newborns. It occurs in about 85% (85 out of 100) of healthy babies. Most babies start sleeping better when they get past this phase.

This fussy phase is called the Period of PURPLE Crying. (See below for what the letters in PURPLE stand for.) To learn more about this phase, visit <http://purplecrying.info/what-is-the-period-of-purple-crying.php>.

What can I do for my fussy baby?

Learn as much as you can about why babies are fussy. This will help you:

- Know ahead of time when your baby may be fussy
- Understand how being fussy is helping your baby
- Feel less anxiety if you cannot soothe your baby
- Avoid overreacting and causing your baby more stress

When your baby is fussy, you can try:

- Soothing methods such as swaddling, shushing, bouncing, cuddling or walking around while you are holding your baby
- Feeding
- Changing your baby's diaper

If you know that your baby is not wet, in pain, or hungry, use soothing methods or just let your baby cry. Your baby can easily become overloaded with a lot of handling and extra stimulation. One to 2 hours of normal fussing can turn into 4 to 6 hours if you get too anxious.

P	U	R	P	L	E
Peak of crying Your baby may cry more each week, the most in month 2, and less in months 3 to 5.	Unexpected Crying can come and go and you won't know why.	Resists soothing Your baby might not stop crying, no matter what you try.	Pain-like face A crying baby may look like they are in pain, even when they are not.	Long lasting Crying can last as long as 5 hours a day, or more.	Evening Your baby may cry more in the late afternoon and evening.

What is colic?

Colic is when a baby is very fussy. The crying is intense and lasts for many hours at a time. We do not fully understand what causes colic. It may be caused by stomach pain.

When babies cry a lot, it is very hard on parents and caregivers. It is normal to feel:

- Anxious or fearful
- Upset if you cannot fix what is wrong
- Angry

What are some ways to cope with colic?

- Hold your baby and walk around.
- Place your baby in a rocker or swing that moves by itself. This movement is like the swaying or rocking a baby feels in the womb.
- Give your baby a bath.
- Ask your partner or support person to take turns holding your baby.
- Know how much crying you can handle. Know when to take a break or get help from your family or friends.
- Make a plan about what you will do if your baby's crying gets out of hand and you reach your limit.
- Line up support ahead of time.
- Remember the 5 S's of soothing your baby:
 - Swaddling
 - Side or stomach
 - Shushing
 - Swinging
 - Sucking

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call us if you have questions or concerns.

Perinatal Education:
206.598.4003

Maternal and Infant Care
Clinic: 206.598.4070

To Learn More

To learn more about how to calm your crying baby and help your baby sleep, read the book or watch the DVD called *Happiest Baby on the Block*, by Harvey Karp, M.D.

To see excerpts from the book and DVD, visit Dr. Karp's website at www.happiestbaby.com. The site also has contact information for certified Happiest Baby Educators in the Seattle area.