

Crying and colic

Crying is a way for babies to communicate. They may be hungry, want to be picked up, need a diaper change or be tired and want to sleep. Don't hesitate to breastfeed your baby if they get hungry earlier than expected. If you're bottle feeding, make sure the nipple has enough flow. Some babies cry and refuse to start drinking again if you interrupt them in order to burp them. It's always best to let the child drink until they're done before taking the breast or bottle away. If a health problem is causing the baby to cry, there should be other symptoms as well (fever, difficulty drinking, cough, nasal congestion, etc.).

Research has shown that in normal babies, crying duration increases gradually from birth to 6 weeks of age, reaching up to 3 hours a day. It then decreases. Excessive crying, called "colic," is when a healthy baby cries for more than 3 hours a day and more than 3 days a week for more than 3 weeks. These practically inconsolable crying spells happen mainly in the evening. This prolonged crying can be annoying, but is perfectly normal behaviour in sensitive babies.

Possible causes

Sometimes, breastfed babies will develop intolerance to cow's milk protein from their mother's diet. To determine if this is what's causing a breastfed baby's colic, the mother must stop having dairy (milk, cheese, yogurt, ice cream, etc.) for a week. Drinking soy milk instead isn't recommended due to the possibility of a concomitant allergy. If the colic goes away, then comes back after reintroducing these foods, you'll know that you need to eliminate them from your diet. A nutritionist can help you with this, and can also advise you on adequate calcium and vitamin D intake. Caffeine is also passed on in breast milk. Excessive consumption of coffee, chocolate, tea or cola-type soft drinks can make your baby more fussy.

Commercial-formula-fed babies may also cry because they're intolerant or allergic to cow's milk protein. In most cases, reactions are delayed by a few hours and may be limited to crying spells, vomiting and/or diarrhea (intolerance). Immediate reactions are more dangerous, but fortunately very rare (allergy). Symptoms may include swelling of the

What to do if your baby cries, but doesn't look sick

In the first few months of life, there's no reason why you shouldn't pick up your baby to comfort them—you're not "spoiling" them. In fact, it's a great way to show your child that you're there for them and they can trust you. If you want to calm your baby, here are some things you can try:

1. First, make sure the child's basic needs are met. Is baby hungry? Feedings should be on demand, not on a set schedule. A breastfed baby may not get enough calories if the latch is poor or if they aren't allowed to empty one breast before switching to the other, as the last bit of milk (hindmilk) is richer. A bottle-fed baby may get fussy if the milk isn't flowing out fast enough (ideally, one drop per second).
 - ✓ Is the baby too hot or too cold?
 - ✓ Does the baby have a soiled diaper?
 - ✓ Is the baby tired?
2. If there's no clear reason for the crying, here are some things you can do to soothe your child:
 - ✓ Use a baby carrier to put them in contact with your body.
 - ✓ Sing them a lullaby.
 - ✓ Talk to them in a soothing voice about anything and everything, rock them, play music.
 - ✓ Wrap them in a dryer-warmed blanket or give them a pacifier if you use them.
 - ✓ Lay them flat on your chest (skin-to-skin) and pat or caress their back.
 - ✓ Give them a bath.
 - ✓ Walk them in your arms or in a stroller or go for a car ride.
 - ✓ Put them on top of a running dryer. This can be dangerous, though, as the vibrations can cause the baby to fall. If you insist on trying this, stay next to the dryer and keep a watchful eye on the baby.
 - ✓ Warning! Heating a magic bag in the microwave and placing it in direct contact with the baby's skin may cause burns.
 - ✓ Placing the baby on a running dryer can cause them to fall.
3. If your baby is inconsolable and you're getting frustrated or angry, your baby's safety must be the PRIORITY:
 - ✓ If you're two parents, take turns.
 - ✓ If you're alone with the baby and you feel that you've reached your limit, remember that being unable to comfort a colicky baby isn't a sign of parental incompetence. Getting frustrated or angry isn't unusual either.

- ✓ Place the baby safely in their crib and leave the room. Call a relative or a friend for support if needed. Check on the baby every 10–15 minutes to make sure they're safe and to reassure them that you're still there.
- ✓ Don't hesitate to contact your CLSC or a support group if you need help.
- ✓ **Warning!** NEVER SHAKE YOUR BABY. This can lead to intracranial bleeding and severe brain damage.

If you have a colicky baby, don't lose hope. Colic usually subsides by 3–4 months of age. It's important not to go it alone. Parents need to support each other and not be afraid to have someone else look after the baby periodically so they can recharge their batteries.

Adapted from:

Labbé, Jean. Bulletin pédiatrique. Votre enfant de la naissance à 4 semaines. 5th Edition, September 2011. Vice-décanat à la pédagogie et au développement professionnel continu, Pavillon Ferdinand-Vandry, Room 2892, 1050 Avenue de la Médecine. Université Laval, Québec G1V 0A6, <https://extranet.fmed.ulaval.ca/FormationContinue/BulletinPediatrique.asp>.