

Soothing A Crying Baby

By Judy Arnall

It's 8pm and your baby won't stop crying. You've checked for signs of illness, and she seems healthy. She's just not happy and you are desperate to sooth her. What can you do?

Infants cry because it's the only way they can communicate their needs. Between the ages of birth to three or four months, the average infant normally cries 1-3 hours a day, most often at supertime/early evening. Inconsolable crying peaks at about two months of age. It's often thought that they need to discharge the energy from the day.

About 20% of babies are born with a fussy temperament. They are not trained to be fussy and their temperament is not a reflection of your parenting skills. They are just fussy babies that need extra care and attention all day long (and probably night too).

Another 10 to 20% of babies are afflicted with colic. Colic is different from temperamental fussiness and is a regular pattern of crying that lasts for four hours at a time and lasts between 2 weeks and four months of age. It occurs most days. The reason is still not clear but recent research points to an immature nervous system rather than gassiness as previously thought.

Some strategies to sooth a crying baby:

- Offer food first. Even if you've heard that babies should eat every 1.5 to 2.5 hours, perhaps she is going through a growth spurt and needs to "cluster" feed for several days. You can't overfeed a baby. She will turn her head away from breast or bottle and not suck.
- Check for illness next. As you get to know your baby, you will have intimate knowledge when things are not normal for her. Trust your "gut feeling" if you think she is sick or something is seriously wrong. Call the Early Start line, or ACH advise line or take her to the hospital emergency.
- Check her diaper. A heavily wet or poopy diaper won't bother some babies, but will irritate others.
- Could be gas. Try carrying baby with your forearm around her tummy and gently rub her back. Or lie her down on your forearm with your inside elbow supporting her head and your hand supporting her pelvis. Gently rub her back with your other hand.
- Check for prickly tags on clothing or hairs and threads wrapped around toes or fingers or neck. Baby may be in pain from some kind of irritant.
- Check if baby is too hot/too cold. Baby should wear the same amount of clothing layers that you do.
- Check if baby needs more sleep. Some babies wake up and seem fussy. Try not to disturb them and encourage them to go back to sleep.

- Motion really calms fussy babies. Walk, dance, sway, rock. Go for a walk in the car or stroller.
- White noise from a fan, vacuum or dishwasher can help too. Buy a white noise machine that will play white noise or nature sounds, or make your own cassette recording.
- Carry your baby in a sling, snugli, or similar carrier. Studies done in cultures where babies are constantly carried, show that babies cry very little. Warmth, touch and motion works magic for babies because they simulate life in the womb.
- Wrap baby in a blanket heated from the dryer. Then rock her.
- Music or yourself humming may help calm the baby.
- Swaddle baby. Flinging arms and legs can upset some babies. Others like loose clothing that allows movement of arms and legs.
- Babies that are over-stimulated from too much activities can be soothed by a dark, quiet room with gentle rocking.

If your baby's doctor diagnoses colic, or you have a fussy baby, get support systems in place for you and baby. If you start feeling helpless, frustrated, and angry because baby is still screaming, hand her over to partner, or a friend or relative that can give you a break. Make a list of her likes and dislikes to post on the fridge. If no one is around, make a safe choice and put the baby down in the crib while you take some deep breaths and calm down. It's okay to take a breather, even if baby is screaming.

Even though it doesn't seem like so at the time, this crying stage passes very quickly. From four to five months of age, baby's crying time decreases immensely

Judy Arnall is a professional international award-winning *Parenting Speaker*, and Trainer, Mom of five children, and author of the best-selling, "***Discipline Without Distress: 135 tools for raising caring, responsible children without time-out, spanking, punishment or bribery***" She specializes in "**Parenting the Digital Generation**" www.professionalparenting.ca (403) 714-6766 jarnall@shaw.ca

Copyright permission granted for "reproduction without permission" of this article in whole or part, if the above credit is included in its entirety.