

Calming a Fussy Baby (Ways to Soothe Your Infant)

Your baby's cry is how he or she communicates. During the first 6 months, babies cry because they have needs that should be met. Sometimes it takes a while to find out what will comfort a baby and for the baby to become more settled. A "settled" baby can be much easier to care for than a younger, fussy infant. The "settled" stage usually starts around 3 months.

Ways to soothe your infant

NEVER shake your baby to try to make him or her stop crying! Shaking can damage your baby's brain. You may have to try a few techniques before you find one that works to calm your infant. Once you find your baby's routine, try to set a schedule. Here are some ideas for calming an irritable, fussy baby:

- Make sure all "comfort needs" are met. Babies like to be dry, warm and full.
- Use a pacifier or help your baby find one of his fingers or a thumb to suck. Some babies can learn to comfort themselves by sucking.
- If you are breastfeeding, wait to give the pacifier until breastfeeding is well established.
- Try stroking baby's head from the front of the forehead to the back of the neck (Picture 1). Cover as much of his head with your hand as you can. Stroke slowly - one stroke for each breath you take in. You can do this while holding him or after baby is in the crib. Many babies will go to sleep when their heads are stroked slowly.
- Some babies will calm down when swinging in an infant swing. Others just get fussier. (Before buying a swing, you may want to borrow one to see if it calms your baby.) Do not overdo it by putting a baby in a swing all the time.

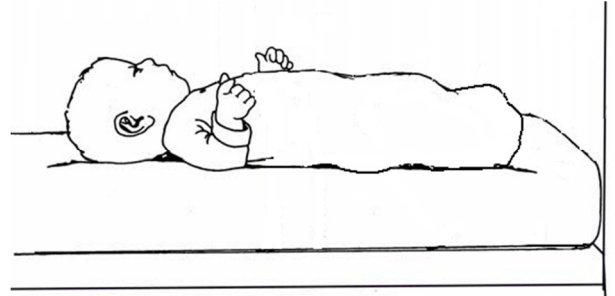


Picture 1 Gently rub the baby's head to help him fall asleep.

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Ways to soothe your infant, continued

- Some colicky babies like gentle motion and warmth. Cuddling your baby against your body with his arms and legs loosely bent while you walk or holding him close while you rock slowly in a rocking chair will sometimes soothe a fussy baby.
- Play a soft lullaby at bedtime. A music box may be soothing. Or try humming or singing a lullaby like "Rock-A-Bye Baby."
- When you put your baby to sleep, try a dim, quiet room to reduce distractions. You can provide soothing background sounds like a fan, a ticking clock, soft music, or nature sounds. Babies should always sleep on their backs.
- If baby falls asleep somewhere other than his crib, move him to the crib, very gently. Disturb his position as little as possible, and always make sure to place him on his back in his own crib. Sharp or sudden movements, especially if it puts your baby in an upright position, can awaken him.
- **If you get to the point where you are very frustrated with the crying and are getting angry at your baby or yourself, it is time for a break from the baby for a few hours.** The break may give you a refreshed outlook so you can handle him more calmly. When you stay calm, your baby is more likely to calm down, too. Find someone to watch the baby while you take a break.
- It may help to know that babies under 6 months can't manipulate (control) you with their crying. Their memories simply aren't developed well enough for them to trick you into spoiling them. And the fussiness will end! In the meantime you can keep on trying different ways to comfort your baby, and you don't need to worry that any of these things will make him spoiled.



Picture 2 Babies should always sleep on their backs.

When to call the doctor

Most of the time, the crying will stop when the baby's "comfort needs" are met. But you should call the doctor if any of these things occurs:

- Your baby cries *constantly* for more than 3 hours.
- The cry changes to a "painful cry" rather than a "fussy cry."
- Your baby also has vomiting or diarrhea.
- The constant crying continues after 3 months of age.
- You cannot soothe your baby no matter what you try.
- You're afraid you might hurt your baby.