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CALMING A FUSSY BABY
(Ways to Soothe Your Infant)

Your baby's cry is how he communicates. During the first 6 months, babies cry because they have needs that should be met. Sometimes it takes awhile to find out what will comfort a baby and for him or her 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.

NEVER shake your baby to try to make him or her stop crying! Shaking your baby can damage his brain. You may have to try a few techniques before you find one that works to calm your baby. 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. Loosen tight clothing and tightly wrapped blankets. Babies like to be dry, warm and full. They also need to lie in a new position from time to time.
- 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.
- Try stroking baby's head from the front of the forehead to the back of the neck. (Picture 1). Cover as much of her head with your hand as you can. Stroke slowly - one stroke for each breath you take in. You can do this while holding her or after baby is in the crib. Many babies will go to sleep when their heads are stroked slowly.

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

- Some babies like to lie on their tummies. Try slowly stroking your baby's back or gently patting his bottom while he is lying on his tummy. Always stay in the same room when your baby is on his tummy.
- Some babies will calm down when swinging in an infant swing. Others just get more fussy. (Before buying a swing, you may want to borrow one to see if it calms your baby.) Don't overdo it by putting a baby in a swing all the time.
- Sometimes mom's own scent is very comforting. Wear a piece of cloth, such as a small scarf or handkerchief for several days in a row. It will pick up your own body scent. This is a smell your baby is used to. Put the cloth item in the crib. The scent will last 3 to 5 days, and then you'll have to replace it with something else. (Don't use anything good - you can never tell what your baby might get attached to! Make sure the item is not large enough to be a suffocation hazard.)

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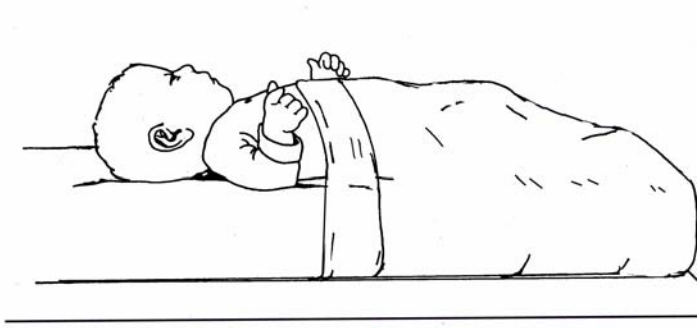
- Some colicky babies like gentle motion and warmth. Cuddling your baby against your body with his arms and legs loosely bent while you walk or holding him close while you rock slowly in a rocking chair will sometimes soothe a fussy baby. Or you can try putting a soft blanket on top of the clothes dryer while it is turned on. Place your baby on his back on top of the dryer. Of course you must stay with your baby at all times!
- 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 when no one is with them.
- If baby falls asleep somewhere other than his crib and you want to move him to the crib, move him very gently. Disturb his position as little as possible. Don't try to put him up to your shoulder or turn him over when you pick him up. This little bit of movement, especially if it puts the baby in an upright position, can awaken the baby.
- If you get to the point where you're very frustrated with the crying and are getting angry at the baby or yourself, it's time for a break from the baby for a few hours. The break may give you a refreshed outlook so you can handle the baby 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 no one is with them.

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 occur:

- 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 can’t soothe your baby no matter what you try.
- You’re afraid you might hurt your baby.