



Information for **parents**  
from Canada's **paediatricians**

## Colic and crying

*Note: When we say “parent,” we mean anyone who cares for a baby regularly and consistently. This may be a mother, father, grandparent, auntie or other extended family member, foster parent, or another important person in the baby’s life.*

Healthy babies cry, coo and make other noises to express their needs and communicate with the people around them. Most of the time, you can figure out what they need: a cuddle, food, sleep, diaper change, or and making sure they are not too hot or cold.

But there are times when even the most caring parent or caregiver can’t soothe a crying baby. You might feel frustrated or overwhelmed, but it’s not your fault. It will get better.

Being patient and gentle are key to getting through these tough times. Also, know when you need a break. Although you are focused on meeting your baby’s needs, it is very important to take care of yourself.

### Why do some babies cry more than others?

All babies cry, some more than others. Sometimes it sounds to you like something is wrong. If you think your baby is not OK, you need to make sure they are healthy and developing well. Bring them for a checkup with their family doctor, paediatrician or public health nurse. If there are no health or developmental concerns, then your baby might be considered “colicky.” This simply means that they tend to cry a lot.

All babies have periods when they cry more. This is part of normal development, and each baby is different. During this “peak” period—usually sometime around 3 to 12 weeks of age — some babies may cry much more than others. They may have more trouble self-soothing and settling. The crying may seem stronger, and it may be harder (sometimes impossible!) to help them soothe.

Here is the good news: First, this crying is normal, and there is no lasting effect on your baby. Second, it won't last forever. This period of strong, intense (and unexplained) crying may lessen over time. Or it can end as quickly as it started. Usually, it is over by the time your baby is 3 to 4 months of age.

## What can I do to help soothe my crying baby?

Your baby is unique, and what helps soothe one baby may not work for yours. You will find what works for you and your baby.

Below are some ideas. Doing these things may also help **prevent** crying—and may help you relax too—so try them at any time:

- See if your baby needs a diaper change, is hungry, is too cold or hot, seems to be in pain, or has a fever.
- Hold your baby. You cannot “spoil” a baby by picking them up.
- Wrap or safely swaddle your baby.
- Dim the lights and keep surroundings quiet. Too much stimulation can often trigger crying or make it worse.
- Soft music, white noise, a shaker, or a gentle “shushing” noise can soothe some babies.
- Many babies are soothed by motion. Try walking with your baby held close to your body or in a stroller. Rock or sway in a gentle, rhythmic motion. Try going for a car ride.
- Sucking sometimes helps babies to calm and relax. If you are breastfeeding, encourage your baby to breastfeed, or offer a pacifier.
- Give your baby a warm bath.

Whatever you do, be gentle and soothing. If you are trying hard to calm your baby but they are still crying, take a moment to check your own feelings. If you are feeling frustrated, take a deep breath, put your baby in a safe place (like their crib) and take a moment to calm yourself.

Ask a trusted family member or friend for help. **It is OK to ask for help.** Taking a break can help.

**Never shake, smother, hit or throw your baby.** These actions can cause serious effects, including lifelong injury or even death. If you are afraid that you or someone else might hurt your baby, talk to your doctor or get help right away.

Babies with special needs or babies exposed to drugs or alcohol during pregnancy may cry more than other babies. They may need to be comforted in different ways. Doctors, midwives, or community health nurses may have suggestions.

## Is my baby crying because of something they ate? Or something I ate?

Colic happens in both breastfed and bottle-fed babies. Changing how you feed your baby (for example switching from breastfeeding to formula feeding, or from one kind of formula to another) probably won't help your baby's crying.

There is not strong evidence that the crying is caused by gas, wind or food allergies.

If you think your baby may have a digestion problem, speak to your doctor about options. For most babies, what they eat does not affect how much they cry. Crying is more likely related to their current phase of development.

Talk to your doctor before using over-the-counter or "natural" products for colic. There is very little scientific evidence to show that these products help.

## When should I make an appointment with the doctor:

Make an appointment with your doctor if you are concerned about any aspect of your child's health or development, or if your baby:

- isn't behaving as usual (for example, sleeping more or less than usual),
- isn't eating or growing normally,
- is vomiting or has diarrhea,
- could be hurt from a fall or injury, or
- cries excessively over a period of more than 3 months.

### Seek care right away if your baby:

- has a fever and is less than 3 months old,

- has bloody stools.

## How can I look after myself?

The early days of taking care of a new baby are hard. You are probably not sleeping much, and you are trying to meet your baby's needs around the clock. A baby's near-constant crying can be stressful. Remember: It is not your fault. It is normal to feel upset or frustrated about the crying sometimes. **It will get better.**

In the meantime, here are ideas for taking care of yourself:

- Tell people you trust that your baby cries a lot. Ask if you can call them for help on days that are especially hard.
- Make a plan for what you will do when you are feeling overwhelmed or too tired to deal with the crying. Write it down or tell someone about it.
- If you have a co-parent or another adult in the home, talk about what each of you can do to take care of the baby and each other.
- If possible, arrange for regular child care so you can get some rest. Find a friend, family member or someone else you trust who has experience with babies. If trusted people offer help, accept it.
- Take slow and deep breaths when the crying feels like too much.
- Eating and sleeping well can make a big difference in how well you can cope. Try to nap when you can and have snacks if you are not able to prepare a full meal.
- Put your baby down in a safe place (in their crib or safe sleeping space) and walk away for a few minutes, or take a shower.
- Cry if you need to. Caring for a crying baby can feel overwhelming.
- Take breaks. If you can, exercise, read or spend time with a friend, even for just a few minutes.
- If you feel sad, anxious, resentful or angry, talk to someone you trust and get help. There are many community resources that support parents, particularly new mothers. If you are not sure where to go, talk to your child's paediatrician, family doctor, public health nurse, or do an online search for support in your area.

## Additional resources

- Coping When Your Baby Can't Stop Crying (a video by the Alberta Network for Safe and Healthy Children)  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZkVu19c41I&feature=youtu.be>)
- Family Connections: A resource booklet about bonding with your child for First Nations and Métis parents (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, First Nations Health Authority)  
([https://www.nccih.ca/495/Family\\_Connections\\_-\\_British\\_Columbia.nccih?id=91](https://www.nccih.ca/495/Family_Connections_-_British_Columbia.nccih?id=91))

## Reviewed by the following CPS committees

- Child and Youth Maltreatment Section
- Early Years Task Force

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