

Newborn behaviour: in a nutshell

By Raising Children Network

It is not possible to 'spoil' a newborn. Every bit of attention you give her now helps her grow and develop.

In your baby's early months, she is working out what the world is like. If your newborn cries and someone comes, and if she is cuddled, kissed and played with, she is going to think the world is a pretty OK place.

On the other hand, if she cries and nobody comes, or if nobody ever smiles or cuddles her, she is going to think the world is a pretty hard place.

Research shows that when a parent responds quickly to comfort a crying infant, the baby cries less often overall. It is absolutely fine to pick your baby up when she cries. It tells her that she is safe because you are a caring, responsive parent who loves her.

Why babies cry

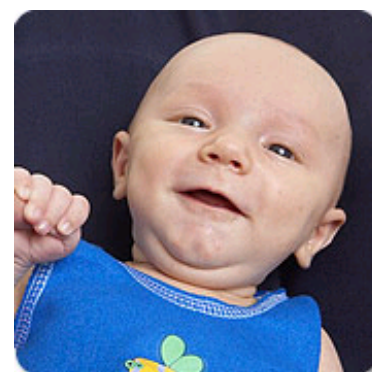
Crying is a newborn's way of communicating, of telling you what she needs. It's a sound that can spur you into action (even when you are fast asleep). It can turn on a mother's milk like some kind of magic remote control.

Crying peaks at six weeks old. This kind of crying will pass. The [crying baby flowchart \(PDF doc: 212kb\)](#) can help you eliminate possible causes of crying, but you may not be able to stop the crying every time. This can be hard for you. If you're not able to comfort your newborn quickly or easily, remind yourself that [crying is what babies do](#). Crying has nothing to do with how good you are as a parent.

Inconsolable crying

Some babies suffer long bouts of unexplainable crying, commonly called [colic](#). Some people believe colic is due to stomach pain caused by [wind](#). Many doctors now think it is simply natural behaviour for some babies, especially at the end of a long day.

Recent research suggests inconsolable crying may be caused by overstimulation. Crying may help a newborn take control of her environment. It's as if your baby is saying, 'Enough already! I'm just going to cry to shut out the world'.



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Coping with inconsolable crying

- Reduce the stimulation around your baby - this may help to soothe her.
- Try sitting in a quiet, dimmed room, laying her on her side and rhythmically patting her back (remembering to turn her onto her back if she falls asleep).
- Inconsolable crying can be very distressing for parents. Try putting in some imaginary earplugs. Let the sound of the crying pass through you, and remind yourself that everything is OK. You are doing all you can to help your baby.

If you feel frustrated, angry, helpless or distressed and are not able to respond to your baby safely, you may need to leave her to cry for a short time while you take time out or ask for help. Lay your newborn on her back in a safe place, like her cot, while you take a short break.

Dealing with crying gets easier as newborns get a handle on the world around them. Babies get better at showing us what they want and we become experts at 'reading' their behaviour. Remember, no-one knows your baby better than you, but if you're worried about your baby's crying, talk it through with your doctor or child health nurse.

[Newborn connecting and communicating: in a nutshell](#) **next** ▶

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GLOSSARY

wind

Gas in the stomach and intestines, sometimes causing pain; usually caused by slowed movement of food through the digestive tract, leading to a build-up of carbon dioxide from bacteria, and sometimes caused by infection or food intolerance.

Last updated