



How Soothing a Baby Helps Reduce Crying

Crying is the only way infants can communicate their needs. Babies cry for many different reasons. Among the most common reasons are fatigue, loneliness, irritability, illness, hunger and colic. Other babies cry because their diaper is dirty or wet, they're too hot or cold, their clothing is too tight or uncomfortable or they are over-stimulated. Crying is normal for babies. If you cannot find the cause of the baby's cry, then there may not be one.

Some of the crying that all infants do is unsoothable crying, meaning that no matter what you do, the crying will continue. So, if you do everything right and the baby continues to cry, that is still OK. It does not mean that the baby is sick, ill or abnormal. Nor does it mean you are not comforting the baby correctly, rather, the baby is just going through an unsoothable crying bout.

The following are ways you can try to comfort a crying baby. It may take a few tries, but with patience and practice you'll find out what works and what doesn't for the baby.

- Changing a baby's position can be soothing. "Changing positions" most often means picking the baby up from lying down, and (usually) putting the baby on your shoulder. There are lots of good things that happen with this simple movement. One is that the baby gets a "new view" of the world. Another is that you often have some eye-to-eye contact with the baby. A third is that the body contact between you and the baby is typically soothing. All of these things and more occur with this one simple change of position.
- Hold the baby in your arms and place her body either on her left side to help digestion or on her stomach for support. Gently rub her back. If your baby goes to sleep, remember to always lay her down in her crib on her back.
- Sing, or turn on soothing music. Sounds that remind babies of being inside the womb may be calming, such as a white noise device, the humming sound of a fan, or the recording of a heartbeat.
- Walk the baby or rock him. Calming motions remind babies of movement they felt in the womb.
- Avoid over feeding the baby because this may also make her uncomfortable. Try to wait at least 2 to 2 ½ hours from the beginning of one feeding to the beginning of the next.
- Make sure the baby is warm or cool enough.
- Take the children for a walk.

What we have been describing above are common behaviors that caregivers do that can comfort or help quiet their infant. Often, these are in response to an already crying baby. That is completely appropriate. However, such soothing behaviors do not need to be limited to responses to a crying baby. In fact, they are also effective ways to prevent babies from becoming crying babies if they are done when the baby is not crying. And this is the second important principle about keeping babies calm: namely, that soothing can work preventively if the soothing activities are applied when the infant is not crying rather than just in response to crying.

Studies have indicated that:

- gentle rocking of quiet newborns in a caregiver's arms was shown to be effective in delaying or reducing crying that came later.
- when parents of babies were asked to increase the amount of carrying and holding they did, they found their babies cried and fussed less than the babies of parents who just did the usual amount of carrying.

What was most interesting was the fact that all parents did a similar amount of carrying and holding in response to crying. It wasn't the "responsive" carrying that made the difference. The increased carrying that made the difference was the carrying that the parents did when the baby was not crying. The parents who did more carrying did it when the baby was not crying, and it was that "proactive" carrying that reduced the crying in their infants.

For more information on how to calm and soothe crying infants go to: <http://www.purplecrying.info> or <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/crying-colic/Pages/default.aspx>.