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Normal Newborn Crying

When your baby won't stop crying

The most common cause for a baby's crying during the first 3 months is to alert you that they need to re-establish close, physical contact with you.

When your baby cries they do not just cry for physical needs, they also cry for social-emotional needs. The more distressed your baby gets the harder it is for your baby to calm down. When you respond to your baby's cries quickly with reassurance, warmth and affection they'll feel safe and secure and usually calm down more quickly. Then your baby can enjoy a feed, cuddle or play.

Unfortunately during the first 4 months there will be times when you won't be able to calm or soothe your baby no matter what you do. This sort of crying is part of what's called "Normal developmental crying."

- Your young baby's crying usually follows normal developmental patterns
- Normal developmental crying usually starts at around 2 weeks and steadily builds up to a peak when your baby is about 2 months old
- At 2 months your baby's crying is usually at its most intense and can be confusing and stressful for both you and your baby
- Your baby's crying normally starts to taper off after 2 months and by 4 months of age the crying has usually reduced again
- Each baby is an individual and some cry for longer periods of time each day than other babies
- Your baby could cry as little as 1 hour to as much as 4 or 5 hours per day. This is a normal range of crying

During this normal developmental crying phase you may notice that your baby has times of intense, inconsolable

crying in the afternoon and evenings. This type of crying is very typical in the 2nd month or at the peak stage of your baby's normal crying period – at around 6 weeks.

If you have a baby that cries for 3-5 hours a day it is often very stressful for you and difficult to cope. Sometimes this type of crying is called “colic” – but it's still part of the normal developmental crying and usually goes away on its own by 3-4 months.

There are some untrue myths that influence the way people think about and respond to young baby's crying, such as:

- Babies are being manipulative
- Babies are looking for attention
- Babies are being a “drama queen”
- When you attend to your baby's cry too much you will reinforce “attention-seeking” behaviour
- You're making your baby “too dependent” on you
- You'll spoil your baby
- You're weak if you give in to your baby

None of those reasons are true. This type of advice came from child care experts in the early 20th century – 100 years ago. 21st century brain research says that ignoring your baby's cry actually interferes with their critical early period of early brain development.

Building a loving relationship with your baby also requires you to promptly attend to your baby's crying as soon as they need you.

Your baby's cry is a strong signal to you that says they need help to calm down. Once you've soothed and comforted your baby they're more able to settle, sleep, feed, play and socialize. Babies who cry for 4-5 hours per day are at the upper end of the normal range of crying.

How can you tell if you need help?

How can you tell if your baby is crying excessively and you and your baby need extra help and support?

A good way to tell if your baby is crying excessively (while otherwise being well and healthy) is if your baby cries and fusses for more than:

- Three hours a day
- Three days a week
- For three weeks in a row

This type of crying is often long, drawn out and persistent, it sometimes seems that nothing you do can calm your baby.

You might notice that your baby:

- Resists being held
- Resists being laid down
- Resists being cuddled and won't snuggle for comfort
- Becomes stiff and arches back
- Prefers to be held upright
- Looks wide-eyed and frightened
- Needs you to rock, sway, nurse and walk for hours at a time
- Doesn't want to look at you

- Fights against falling asleep
- Sometimes has a swollen tummy and flexed knees which is often mistaken for colic
- Cluster feeds in the afternoon or evening

This type of crying is due to immature neurobiological processes that occur in the first 4 months and are normal.

What you can do?

First and most importantly remember your baby is not crying because of:

- Your lack of care and efforts to soothe your baby
- Your inexperience
- Your baby's birth order
- Your baby's difficult temperament or personality
- Being a bad baby
- Your fault

Reassure yourself that it's not your fault that your baby is going through this normal crying phase. Don't try to tough it out on your own. It's OK to ask someone for help to understand any intense feelings you may have.

Soothing strategies

It's important to use a range of 3-4 gentle and affectionate strategies that are easy to follow and have a slow, soothing pace.

- Carry your baby in an approved baby carrier next to your chest, making sure you are as relaxed as you can

be. Your baby will hear your heartbeat which is better than a heartbeat app. Your baby knows the difference

- Speak to your baby in a calm soothing voice
- Sing in a low soft voice
- Cuddle and gently kiss your baby's head
- Put your baby on their back or tummy and use a gentle, rhythmic pat, rub or touch to soothe
- Take your baby for a walk in the pram
- Place your baby in a soft, firm wrap with arms flexed on chest and your baby's hands available to suck. This enables your baby to soothe
- If you use white noise, baby-safe massage oil etc, incorporate this into the routine

Whatever strategy you use don't keep changing for new and different ones. You and your baby need a familiar comforting routine during this period. By 4 months this normal crying period should resolve with no long term effects.

If you are distressed or finding it difficult to cope with your baby's crying:

- You can call the Tresillian Parent's Help Line on 1300 272 736 or visit www.tresillian.org.au
- Make an appointment to see your local Child & Family Health Nurse or your GP to discuss supports available in your area.
- Accept help from family members and friends – sometimes you just need a short break to rest or re-charge your batteries.

Tresillian Day and Residential Services support families experiencing a range of early parenting challenges including:

- Sleep and settling difficulties
- Adjustment to parenthood
 - Breastfeeding
 - Infant nutrition
 - Toddler behaviour
 - Multiple babies
- Emotional and psychological health & wellbeing
 - Postnatal depression and anxiety

For Parenting Support or to Self Refer to a Tresillian Service call:

Tresillian Parent's Help Line
1300 272 736

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For useful parenting tips visit

tresillian.org.au

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