

Why Babies Cry

Babies cry a lot. But it might reassure you to know that research shows newborn crying is not emotional, it comes from the communication area of the brain, so your baby is not sad when he is crying. He's just trying to tell you something.

1. The *major* reason a newborn cries is that he feels insecure. Babies are born with two instinctive fears: *fear of falling* and *fear of being exposed*. When they are not held closely and snugly with their arms and legs close to their bodies, they have a sense of falling through space that is pretty scary. You will even see this when changing the diapers! Or when they are lying in the middle of a wide flat area, like on their backs in a baby bed, they are hard-wired to scream in fear. Anytime Baby feels his arms and legs flailing, he shrieks and flails even more. The swaddle is the cure. New babies should be swaddled almost all the time except during the brief time they are awake for feeding or interaction. It's good to have him lie in a basket or small bassinet and make it as cozy as possible (while still observing all safety warnings about pillows and blankets!) See Harvey Karp's DVD or book *The Happiest Baby on the Block*, and read "All About Swaddling" if you have swaddling questions. Babies outgrow these fears at about 8 weeks old.
2. New babies cry when they are sleepy or tired. Did you know that babies do not know how to get to sleep? All they know is to scream at you to help them do it. The first two weeks this may not seem true, because a newborn is generally overly sleepy during the first two weeks. But almost on day 15 Baby switches to a distinctively different sleep cycle (just when you think you have it figured out). For more information see "How and When to Get Baby to Sleep." Just know that until Baby is about 3 months old, you will *have to help him get to sleep* and he will almost never go to sleep on his own, no matter how tired or sleepy he is. Also he will often not sleep long alone and will need to be held a lot to help him stay asleep. Baby slings were invented for this reason!
3. Airborne miseries: Air in the stomach or the belly will make Baby cry a lot and can even make him root *as if* he is hungry. Burp baby well during and after a feeding, and learn good techniques (from a baby care book such as Dr. Sears' *Baby Book*) for helping to relieve gassiness. If Baby ate an hour ago and is sleeping peacefully but suddenly begins to yell, he is certainly not hungry. Hunger sneaks up slowly, it doesn't pounce out of the blue. No, that cry is air-borne. Pick him up and burp him, or help him relieve his gas. (And know that you are going to have to help him get back to sleep, see #2 above.) During weeks 3 through 8, Baby will experience a lot of gassiness that is not related to swallowing air (or what *you* are eating, if you are breastfeeding), but is a result of his digestive system maturing. Many pediatricians recommend Mylicon drops given before every feeding during this period of digestive development. They also recommend Babies' Bliss or Wellemen's Gripe Water (herbals for tummies). We don't recommend Little Tummy's Gripe Water because of some of its ingredients.
4. Over-stimulation from Weeks 3 though 8 causes a LOT of crying. About Day 15, your baby's brain will begin to develop. His senses switch on and suddenly the lights and noises and tensions of his new world make him quite overstimulated by the end of his day. Did you ever see a two-year-old running frantically around the house late at night, unable to calm down and go to sleep? That's the same thing going on with your newborn during this Evening Meltdown Period. Review Dr. Karp's 5 Ss, keep swaddling and shooshing and know that this will pass in a few weeks. It also helps a lot to keep Baby as calm as possible during the day and to watch carefully for those sleep windows so you can prevent the over-stimulation from being too much to handle.
5. Other reasons: Did you think I had forgotten hunger? Actually, unless you have delayed your baby's feeding until he is well past his earliest hunger signals, he will *rarely* ever be crying from hunger. Other reasons include a) too cold or hot, b) tangled up in clothing or too-loose swaddle, c) wet or poopy diaper (very rarely), d) sick and yes, e) hunger. These are easy to figure out if you have checked all of the above reasons first. And here's one more, only I don't count this as crying. Baby may yell when you dress him or try to park him in his car seat, or otherwise "mess with" him. Babies do NOT like to be messed with and will loudly tell you so!