

What is Wrong with My Baby?

A crying baby can be very frustrating to deal with. Crying is one way a baby communicates with you. This guide can help you understand what your baby is trying to tell you.

The Normal Baby

- 1) **Hunger:** When babies are hungry, they start to root actively and make little noises that sound irritable. If left unfed, they gradually get more irritable and soon will start to scream. They quickly settle when put to the breast.
- 2) **Strong Let-Down:** Babies will be upset at the start of the feed when the let-down is very strong and they are getting more milk than they can handle. This is more common in mothers with a very large milk supply. Such babies tend to choke at the breast. They also click while nursing, nurse quickly, and sometimes refuse the second side. They will clamp on the areola or let go or pull back while nursing. This is a normal pattern. With time, such babies learn to deal with the let-down.
- 3) **Gastrocolic Reflex:** Babies' digestive systems are very active as babies grow very quickly during the first year of life. When babies fill their tummies, signals are sent to the bowel to work. As the bowel contracts, pushing the contents ahead of it, babies feel a cramp, much like when adults have diarrhea. Babies will grimace, pull up or extend their legs, and are fussy at the breast. The parents can hear the tummy noises as the bowels work. The pain usually lasts a minute or two and then clears. It can happen during or just after feeds. Adults still have a little of this reflex as meals often trigger a bowel movement. This pattern is often inaccurately described as "gas".
- 4) **Burping:** Babies will get irritable if they need to be burped. Putting them on your shoulder and massaging upwards on their backs for 20 seconds usually does the trick. Sleeping babies do not need to be woken up for a burp. Some babies spit with burps. Bottled babies swallow more air and need more burping.
- 5) **Need to be Held:** Babies are very immature and need extremely frequent contact and care. This is normal. Most babies do not tolerate being put down. They quickly become upset and fuss or cry. They settle when held. Holding them allows them to feel secure and helps them relax.
- 6) **Need to Nurse to Sleep:** During the first few weeks after birth, babies will start to be awake after feeds. However, after a little awake time, they need to nurse to sleep. They communicate this by acting hungry. They nurse for 5 or 10 minutes and then fall asleep on the breast. This is normal. Some families misinterpret these little mini-feeds as a sign of not enough breast milk.

- 8) Evening Fussies: Many breastfed babies are unhappy and crabby during the evening hours. They tend to feed for very short periods, are hard to settle, and irritable. This is a normal pattern that usually starts between 4 to 6 weeks. This is actually a very nice pattern as babies tend to have a longer sleep after their fussy periods. You lose your evenings but get the nights! These babies do not require any medical treatment. The evening fussies disappear by 4 to 5 months. Some babies will start the fussies during the first month of life. Unfortunately, they fuss from 3 to 5 am. As they get closer to six weeks of age, they will move their fussy period to the evening. Again, this is normal.
- 9) Developmental Changes: As babies grow, they become more and more distracted at the breast. This is especially pronounced after 4 months of age. Some mothers are concerned that their babies will not get enough milk and force the baby onto the breast. Babies then become mad when treated this way. Babies are very good at getting what they need through nursing and mothers need not be concerned. Babies also nurse more quickly as they grow. Again, forcing babies to nurse longer than they want to tends to cause irritation in the baby.

The Sick Baby:

- 1) Cow's Milk Protein Sensitivity: When babies nurse, they receive a little bit of what the mother has eaten. This is normal. These foods flavour the milk, making it more interesting and tastier. This also helps the babies accept a varied and healthy diet later on. The occasional baby is sensitive to the mother's food and the most common offender is cow's milk protein. These babies are never contented. They fuss, cry, and are generally very difficult to settle. They gain well. Some of these babies develop hives, asthma, or eczema, or have blood in their stools. Eliminating cow's milk from the mother's diet solves the problem. This is not common.
- 2) Reflux: The stomach- makes an acid to help digest milk and protect the baby from- infection. There is a valve between the stomach and swallowing tube (the esophagus) that keeps the acid out of the swallowing tube. In some babies, this valve is not sealing well enough. When they lie flat or have milk in their stomach, the acid spills back into the swallowing tube and rarely, the throat and lungs. These babies tend to be very fussy after feeds. Crying can last for an hour or more. They are happier when held upright after feeds. This is different from spitting up. "Spitty" babies are normal and happy.
- 3) The Sick Baby: Babies who are ill tend to be unhappy and do not gain well. There are many causes of illness. Some last for short periods and are obvious such as colds. Others can be less obvious such as bladder infections.

- 5) Lactose Intolerance: Lactose is the main sugar in milk. It cannot be absorbed into the human body unless it is digested first by an enzyme called lactase. If it is not digested, it travels through the baby's bowels, irritates the bowel and feeds the bacteria that live there. There are very, very few babies who are born without this enzyme. Adults are much more likely to be missing the enzyme, especially if they have an African, Asian, or Aboriginal background.

Myths:

- 1) Mother's Diet: It is very rare that spices, vegetables, small amounts of coffee or chocolate in mother's diet will cause a fussy baby. Eat whatever you like in moderation. Avoid cigarettes and alcohol.
- 2) Hair Treatment: Colouring your hair or having a perm will not cause fussing.
- 3) Spoiling Your Baby: Babies have needs around feeding, warmth, and security. Meeting these needs is good parenting. Later on, good parenting is teaching children about right from wrong, safe from unsafe, polite behaviour, keeping them away from junk food and so on.
- 4) Scheduling Babies: Babies who are not allowed to feed when they are hungry tend to be more irritable and gain poorly. Feed the baby when s/he acts hungry, day and night. Missing night time breastfeeding will decrease your milk supply. Your baby might also not get enough milk and grow too slowly.
- 5) One Breast or Two: Most babies need to nurse on both breasts at each feed. If they are only given one breast when they want both, they don't get enough milk, gain poorly and are irritable. So give the first and when they are done, offer the second.
- 6) Teething: Babies get teeth. This nearly always happens without any problems. If baby is suddenly irritable, look to other causes first.
- 7) Breast Milk Quality: Unless you are literally starving, your breast milk is always of the highest quality.
- 8) Pacifier: Babies need to nurse at the breast to settle, to feel secure and to eat. The pacifier is a breast-substitute and can cause poor weight gain, ear, chest and stomach infections and thrush in the baby's mouth.
- 9) Bottling Babies at Night Will Make Them Sleep Longer: There is no evidence to support this.