

Crying baby

'All noise at one end and no sense of responsibility at the other' is an old saying about infants. However, crying is an important expression to develop a proper interaction between the baby and parent or carer.

What is normal crying?

During the first few weeks, the average baby sleeps a lot and when awake cries loud and often, usually without tears. From 6 weeks onwards, the baby has some wakeful periods without crying, and by 6 months spends 3-4 hours a day playing and gurgling without crying.

What is excessive crying?

Crying is excessive when it lasts for long periods when the baby should be sleeping or playing. It appears to be more common with the first baby and is aggravated by parents getting angry with the baby.

A check list of common causes

- hunger
- wet or soiled nappy
- teething
- infant colic
- loneliness or seeking attention
- infection

You should keep these problems in mind when you check your crying baby.

Feeding problems and hunger

The main feeding problem that causes crying is underfeeding. If so, the baby will be slow in gaining weight and may pass small, firm, dark-green motions. It is important to check this with your doctor or infant welfare nurse.

Passing urine or wet nappies

Wet or dirty nappies may cause discomfort to babies, and so this needs to be checked. Do not fall for the old trap of thinking that passing urine is painful for the baby. It is worth remembering that crying can cause the baby to pass urine.

Teething

Babies usually cut their first teeth between the ages of 6 months and 2 years. The gum is often swollen and sore at the spots where the tooth erupts. This discomfort can make the baby cry, but it does not usually last for longer than a week.

Infant colic

This is one of the commonest causes of unexplained gusty crying in an infant. It is a distressing but harmless problem that some babies develop from as early as 1-2 weeks of age and lasts until 12-16 weeks. It typically develops in the late afternoon and early evening and lasts for about 3 hours in a day and continues for at least 3 weeks.

Loneliness

Some babies may cry because they feel lonely and are looking for comfort and attention. If the baby stops crying when picked up, the cause may well be this lonely feeling.

Infections

Infections are not all that common in infants but will be diagnosed by your doctor. Examples of such infections are a respiratory tract virus, urinary tract infection, gastroenteritis and middle ear infection. A middle ear infection, which can cause much distress, may be indicated by a fever, running nose and the baby pulling at his or her ear.

What should be done?

Simply check out and attend to these common causes. It is important to understand that these crying episodes are not the mother's (or carer's) fault and that the mother needs help to allow her to rest and get over the birth. It is common for some mothers to feel a failure, but nothing could be further from the truth. These crying periods do not usually last very long. Seek advice from your doctor if you are worried and cannot work out the cause or remedy. You must report any unusual symptoms.