

50 WAYS TO CALM A FUSSY BABY

American Baby – May 1987

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The morning after my first child was born; my pediatrician came in to examine him. As he concluded the exam, he mentioned that Daniel was one of the most alert newborns he had ever seen.

“I should warn you, though,” he added, “that very alert babies tend to be fussy. These bright newborns seem to thrive on stimulation, and until they can provide that for themselves, they tend to be bored.”

Eight days later, on the verge of hysteria, I phoned my doctor. I was a sleep-deprived bundle of nerves. “I don’t know what the matter with him is.” He never sleeps. He wants to be held all the time.”

We spoke for a while, and my doctor concluded that Daniel was indeed “fussy”: although he seemed to cry constantly and was rarely content, there was nothing physically wrong with him. Fussy babies often nap for only 15 to 20 minutes at a time and, when awake, rarely seem to be content in any one position for more than a few minutes. Caring for this type of baby requires infinite patients, resourcefulness, and a great deal of energy.

The following 50 hints for calming your newborn—and yourself—have all been “laboratory-tested” by fatigued moms and dads across the land. Don’t panic and try all of them today! Give your baby an adequate chance to show you how she feels about each situation before you discard it in favor of trying something new. If something doesn’t work on Tuesday, try it again on Friday. By Friday your baby will be a different person and could respond differently. And most important, again, remember that one day before too long, this list will be moved from your nightstand into your baby’s keepsake box.

ALLEVIATING PHYSICAL DISTRESS

When a baby has been crying for longer than anticipated and nothing seems to quiet him, many parents worry that he is sick or has colic. Fortunately, your newborn is probably not sick unless his crying is accompanied by fever, vomiting, diarrhea, nasal congestion, coughing, or significantly decreased appetite. (Even with one or more of these symptoms, your baby may not be sick.) If you are in doubt, however, it is always best to call your doctor.

“Colic” is a tricky term. Some pediatricians consider it to be a physical ailment resulting from gas trapped in the stomach or intestines. Others feel that colic is just a catchall phrase used to describe babies who cry frequently. In either case, since time is the only permanent cure for colicky behavior, the important point is not labeling it, but coping with it.

1. The single most intense feeling of distress experienced by newborns is hunger. No other discomfort signals a situation as vital to his survival as the need for food. It may take a few weeks, but you will become attuned to your baby’s unique feeding needs.

2. If you are nursing, be sure to watch your own diet carefully. Something you are eating may not “agree” with your baby.
3. If you are bottlefeeding, some babies seem to respond well to a change in their formula.
4. A change in the temperature of a bottlefed baby’s formula, either warmer or cooler, may help.
5. Occasional gas pains can be a source of discomfort for newborns. Whether breast- or bottlefeeding, babies do swallow some air as they feed. Be sure to burp your baby after feeding or, if necessary, during the feeding.
6. If your baby has trapped gas that needs to be expelled for comfort, hold him facedown lengthwise across your forearm to provide slight warmth and pressure on his tummy.
7. Laying baby on his back and pumping his legs slowly and gently up and down in a bicycle motion may also help expel gas.
8. If your baby seems more comfortable on his tummy, you can try laying him over a very small pillow made from towels. This position may encourage gas expulsion.
9. Warmth can be added to the above position by using a slightly warm heating pad or hot water bottle filled with warm (not hot) water. To make sure that your baby is sufficiently protected, place a towel or cloth diaper between him and the heating pad or water bottle.
10. Some babies will cry just before moving their bowels or when they need to have their diaper changed.
11. If your baby is crying due to discomfort from diaper rash, the best cure is to let him go diaperless. For the less brave among us, however, there are several over-the-counter products that work very effectively to heal diaper rash.
12. If you are using cloth diapers, be sure to check for the age-old source of pain: an open diaper pin.
13. The temperature of your baby’s environment can also be a source of discomfort. The rule of thumb is usually to dress a baby in the same amount of clothing that you wear yourself. Newborns usually prefer to be kept slightly warm as opposed to cool, however, so make sure that he is covered adequately.
14. A pacifier can be the best friend of a baby who requires constant sucking. Although pacifiers seem to go in and out of fashion through the years, they are worth trying. If your baby rejects the first pacifier you offer, try other shapes and sizes, particularly the smaller ones specifically designed for the newborn.
15. If your baby won’t take a pacifier, try letting her suck on your little finger with your fingernail side down on her tongue. (Princess Diana used this technique effectively when Prince William decided to howl through one of his first royal photo sessions.)
16. For most newborns, being held to your body in a baby carrier seems to restore the sense of security provided by the confined space of the uterus.

17. Being tightly swaddled in a soft blanket also gives the newborn a secure feeling.
18. A warm bath can be very relaxing to some babies, again simulating the uterine environment.
19. Bathing with mommy or daddy is another soothing technique.
20. For some babies nothing short of being held in mommy's arms will do the trick.
21. For those times when you are desperate for some sleep and your baby needs to be physically near you, consider laying her down in bed next to you, or even on your chest, (Make sure that she cannot fall off and that her nose is unobstructed by sheets, blankets, or pillows.) Many pediatricians advise against taking newborns to bed for fear that the habit will be difficult to break. One pediatrician told me, "I just don't believe that it's appropriate, and I always advise against it. But I know that parents will resort to almost anything when they're totally exhausted. And," he winked as he took out a picture of himself and his six-month-old daughter blissfully asleep in his bed, "if you tell anyone about this, I'll deny it!"

RHYTHMIC MOVEMENT

Before birth your baby was used to constant movement lulling her to sleep. And now, that same movement will often produce the same results.

22. The rocking chair is a timehonored technique for quieting a crying baby.
23. A cradle is another tried-and-true baby-quieter.
24. The infant swing is a more modern rendition of the above.
25. A crib on springs instead of wheels may add to its soothing effect.
26. Baby hammocks that hang inside the crib are another innovation that can help calm a baby.
27. Water-filled crib mattresses and crib attachments that make the crib vibrate have also been introduced in the fussy-baby market.
28. Many newborns relax when taken for a ride in the car (the bumpier the better).
29. A long ride in the stroller may also do the trick. If going outside isn't practical, you might try strolling your baby from room to room in the house.
30. Some babies respond well to more unusual movements. One mother reported that her son would calm down only if she held him and twisted her upper torso quickly from side to side. And several parents mentioned that their babies responded well to being lifted straight up and down, in an elevator-type motion.

SOOTHING SOUNDS

31. The lullaby has long symbolized the quieting influence of music.
32. If you're not comfortable singing, don't worry: most babies respond well to the tone and rhythm of their mother's voice in normal conversation and especially to the higher pitched "baby talk" that seems to come naturally when addressing a newborn.
33. The music box has helped soothe fussy babies through the ages.
34. Recordings of the heartbeat as it is heard in utero can often calm a fussy baby.
35. Somewhat less exotic but usually effective is the sound produced by a dishwasher.
36. The washing machine can soothe many a cranky baby.
37. If your baby's still crying after a wash cycle is complete, plop your clothes in the dryer, its sound may soothe.
38. The vacuum cleaner is often cited as a bona fide baby calmer.
39. Soft music on the radio can calm baby---and mom and dad too.

STIMULATION: NEW SIGHTS

40. Take him outside; fresh air and lots to look at may ease your baby's fretting.
41. A shopping mall may offer enough distractions to keep baby calm.
42. Visiting at a friend's house can sometimes soothe a restless baby.
43. At home you can provide stimulation for your baby in his crib with a mobile (but make sure it's out of reach).
44. A wind-up "busy box" that hooks onto the side of the crib can keep an easily bored baby busy.
45. A mirror-type toy is a surefire baby-pleaser.
46. Many babies seem to enjoy the visual stimulation of television.

FOR YOURSELF

It sometimes seems a cruel irony that just when you need your sleep the most, you are least likely to get it. Fatigue can rob you of your patience and your ability to cope well with your baby.

47. If you are bottlefeeding, ask your husband to give the nighttime feeding on alternate nights so that you can sleep. (As an extra benefit, the special bond between daddy and newborn will be strengthened by this schedule.)
48. In general, accept help from anyone who offers it genuinely. Having help with cooking, household chores, or babysitting will give you much needed opportunity to rest and refresh yourself.
49. Be sure that you make the opportunity to spend time alone with your husband and other adults.

50. Many mothers find that joining a playgroup helps them to meet other new moms and also gives the babies an opportunity to interact.

As all of us with fussy babies know there will occasionally be days when absolutely nothing seems to calm your child or yourself.

When you are no longer able to cope, or if your baby is suffering from overstimulation or excessive handling by too many friends or relatives, allowing your baby to “cry it out” can be your best bet. Make sure that your baby is either in his crib or playpen (the only two safe places to leave him out of your sight), and take a few minutes to try to relax in another room. Let him cry for ten minutes or so, hold him for a few minutes, and let him cry for ten minutes again. Many babies will cry themselves to sleep this way or fall asleep in your arms.

Always remember, this difficult time will pass. One day before too long, your drooling toddler will gurgle, “Mama,” and your heart will melt.

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