



Healthy Lifestyle

Infant and toddler health

It's tough to listen to a crying baby, but you can handle it. Slow down, take a break — and know when to ask for help.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

All babies cry, but the tears can take a toll.

When nothing you do soothes your crying baby, you might feel anxious. What if there's something wrong and you miss it? What if you lose control?

Take heart in your ability to care for your baby — and to recognize when you're reaching the end of your rope.

When your baby cries, start with the basics.

A crying baby might simply need to be fed, burped or changed. Maybe it's time for a nap, a change in position or a session in the rocking chair. Or perhaps your crying baby needs a little more — or a little less — attention.

If your baby seems otherwise OK but the crying continues, do your best to stay calm. Getting tense or upset might only make the crying worse.

Remember, crying doesn't hurt anyone — including the baby.

To stay in control of the situation, you might:

- **Keep it quiet.** Hold your baby close to you, and quietly sing or talk to your baby. Repeat a calm word or phrase, such as, "You're OK."
- **Get moving.** Weather permitting, put your baby in the stroller and take a brisk walk. You might even buckle the baby into his or her car seat and take a short drive.
- **Think rationally.** Remind yourself that it's OK to be frustrated by your baby's crying, but getting angry isn't going to help.
- **Take a timeout.** If you're alone, put your baby in a safe place — such as the crib or bassinet. Let your baby cry while you take a few minutes to regroup in another room.

- **Be realistic.** Remind yourself that you're not failing your baby if you can't stop a crying spell. Sometimes babies simply need to cry it out.
- **Ask for help.** Let your partner or another loved one take over for a while. Take advantage of baby-sitting offers from trusted friends or neighbors. Use the time to take a nap or simply relax. If you're worried about your ability to cope with a crying baby, contact a family member or friend, your health care provider, a local crisis intervention service or a mental health help line for support.

When your crying baby can't be calmed, you might be tempted to try just about anything to get the tears to stop. It's OK to be creative — but never shake your baby.

Babies have weak neck muscles and often struggle to support their heads. Shaking your baby out of sheer frustration might have devastating consequences — including blindness, brain damage or mental retardation. Severe shaking can be life-threatening or even fatal.

If you're having trouble managing your emotions or dealing with parenthood, seek help. Your baby's health care provider might offer a referral to a counselor or other mental health provider.

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