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Interpreting Crying

As parents, we are often sleep-deprived and worried, which makes interpretation very challenging at times. Use these questions to try to identify why your baby might be crying:

1. Are you hungry? Most babies will cry when they are hungry. Your baby may put his hand to his mouth, suck vigorously on a finger or pacifier, smack his lips, or root. Try offering your baby a feed.
2. Do you need a diaper change? Babies vary in how long they will tolerate a wet or soiled diaper. Some will want to be changed right away; others don't seem to notice. A clean diaper will quickly resolve crying as a result of a dirty bottom.
3. Are you tired? Babies need a lot of rest, but often have difficulty soothing themselves to sleep. They will often fuss, cry, and become agitated or inconsolable when they need to sleep, especially if they are overtired.
4. Do you want to be held? Babies love to be held close in order to feel, hear, and smell their caregivers. Many people worry about spoiling a baby by carrying them too much, but you cannot spoil a baby with attention in the first few months of life.
5. Is your tummy bothering you? Gas can make an infant uncomfortable. Infants may pull up their legs, pass gas, or strain and grunt when passing stool. Try placing your baby on his belly, moving his legs back and forth in a bicycling motion, or giving him a gentle tummy massage.
6. Do you need to burp? Crying that occurs during or after a feed can be due to gas or liquid and stomach acid traveling back up the esophagus. Babies can swallow a lot of air while breast- or bottle-feeding and may need to burp during or after feeding. Some babies burp spontaneously, but others need help to do so.
7. Are you too warm or cold? Babies may feel too hot or too cold, and are very sensitive to being over- or underdressed. Generally, one light layer more than what an adult is wearing will keep a baby comfortable.
8. Are you in pain? Little things that can be hard to spot may be causing pain. Your baby may have a small cut or abrasion that is difficult to see, or a rough tag or stitching on clothing may be causing him discomfort.
9. Are you teething? In general, the first tooth arrives between 6 and 10 months, but there is huge variation. Teething pain may be relieved by over-the-counter pain medication, including acetaminophen, or by providing a cool, clean cloth or teething ring for your baby to chew on.



10. Do you need stimulation or a break? The sights, sounds, sensations, and smells of the world outside the womb are all new to a baby. Sometimes a baby may want to experience more of what is around him and he'll cry to tell you he needs more stimulation. Other times, a baby may cry to tell you there is too much going on and he needs a break. Finding the right amount of stimulation for your baby is a learning process, and that amount will change as your baby grows.

11. Are you sick? Babies may cry to tell you they are feeling sick. A sick baby may be less active, may not want to feed or may feed less, or may have a fever. Trust your instincts, because you know your baby best. If you suspect your baby is sick, talk to your doctor.

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Find more information on how to care for your baby in [*Baby Care Basics*](#).