

Soothing Your Baby

In the hospital and at home



During the first year of life, your baby learns by what they gather through their senses of taste, smell, sight, touch and hearing. Most calming techniques focus on one of these senses. Read on for ways to help calm your baby.

Helping your baby during a procedure

While in the hospital, your baby will most likely have some unpleasant procedures and pokes. The staff and doctors will try to make your child as comfortable as possible. Here's how you can help:

- Remind your baby's health-care providers to use the treatment room for any painful tests or pokes. This leaves your baby's room crib as a place that feels safe to rest and recover.
- Ask about things that can help your baby feel more comfortable, like Sweetease, pacifiers or numbing cream before pokes.
- If your baby is awake for the procedure, you will probably be able to stay with them. You

are there to comfort and support your baby, not to restrain them. You should not be asked to hold your baby down.

- Talk to your baby in a quiet, calm voice.
- Sing a lullaby or a favorite song or blow bubbles.
- Only uncover the area where the procedure will happen. Keep the rest of baby clothed or blanketed.
- If your baby can sit up, ask your baby's health-care provider if they can do the procedure while your baby is sitting instead of lying down.

The 5 S's

Dr. Harvey Karp, author of *The Happiest Baby on the Block*, suggests five ways to calm your baby. They all start with the letter "S" and are called the "5 S's."

- **Shooshing:** Try making a shooshing sound to your crying infant; this often calms them since it resembles the sounds they heard in the womb.
- **Swaddling:** Some babies cry when you try to lay them down. If this happens, try wrapping them snugly in a blanket. This is called swaddling, and it gives them the sense of being securely held. Ask your baby's nurse to show you how.
- **Side/stomach lying:** Gently and securely hold your baby on their left side or on their tummy until they are calm. When they are ready, you can put them back into their crib on their back.

Soothing Your Baby

- Swaying: Gently sway side to side as you hold your baby.
- Sucking: Give your baby a pacifier or your clean fingertip to suck on. This helps their brain develop and can help your baby comfort themselves.

The importance of using music with your baby

- Sing to your baby! Music and singing soothes babies. It also helps parents and babies bond with each other and helps babies develop language.
- Babies like to hear the voice of their parent or caregiver. If you cannot be at the crib side, record your voice reading, singing or talking to your baby. The staff can play this while you are away so your baby can hear your voice.
- Use music for 20 to 30 minutes at a time, and then have a break with no music for the same amount of time or longer. Music is helpful, but babies need their rest, too.
- Music is *fun!* It can help reduce the stress of being in the hospital for both you and your baby. Music can change the mood for both the baby and their caregiver.

It does seem to matter what type of music you play. Babies like soothing music without loud, surprising horns or drums.

How to tell your baby has had enough

Your baby is probably tired or overwhelmed when they:

- Have a grimacing, red face.
- Lean away from you.
- Cry.
- Put out a “halt hand,” or hold an arm out straight as if to say “stop.”

- Avoid eye contact.
- Splay fingers: all the fingers of the hand open out.
- Have a startle response, when your baby jumps or moves suddenly, like they have seen something scary or surprising.

What you can do to help

When your baby shows you that they have had enough:

- Stop what you are doing.
- Put your baby's hands to their chest.
- Swaddle your baby.
- Let your baby take a moment to look at your face before being picked up. Speak to your baby in a quiet, calm voice.
- When your baby calms down, slowly start doing what you were doing before they became upset (singing, reading, etc.).
- Keep yourself calm. Babies look to their parents for cues on how to stay calm.

Other tips to help your baby feel more comfortable

- Ask nursing staff to combine your baby's care. For example, ask that vital signs and other care be combined to limit the number of interruptions in your baby's schedule.
- Keep your baby's schedule of feeding, napping, play and bath times. It comforts your baby to know what is coming next. Routine is great!
- Bring in favorite toys. Familiar toys and comfort items from home will ease your baby's transition to the hospital and back home again.
- Post family photos around your baby's crib and room.

Soothing Your Baby

- Minimize stimulation. Dim the lights and reduce the noise level when your baby is over-stimulated. Turn off the TV and try to only have one music player or crib mobile on at a time.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under the age of 2 do not watch TV.
- Babies can pick up on and feel their parents' anxiety, stress and worry. Take care of yourself; this makes you more relaxed and your baby will be calmer as well.
- Know about stranger anxiety. Keep in mind that babies usually develop a normal fear of people who are not their parents or close caregivers at about 9 months of age.

How to help your crying baby

Babies cry for many reasons. As you get to know your baby and their cries, you will become the expert in what they need. Check what your baby is trying to tell you.

Is your baby:

- Wet or poopy and just needs a diaper change?
- Hungry?
- Tired?
- Lonely?
- Bored?
- Over-stimulated?

Resources for your baby care needs

Here are some materials and supplies we may have on hand for you. Ask your child's nurse about:

- Scrap-booking baby's firsts (first bath, smile, etc.)
- Disposable cameras

- Blankets and quilts
- Infant toys, mobiles and music
- Basic Baby Care videos on the Children's Television bedside TV system
- Normal growth and developmental books and pamphlets from our Family Resource Center, 5th floor

For more information or help with your baby

Ask your nurse for information about these hospital services:

- Child Life Specialists: For special help with the emotional and developmental needs of hospitalized infants. Call (206) 987-2037 Monday through Friday.
- Music therapist: For consultation on uses of music to reduce stress and promote growth and development. Call our board-certified music therapist at (206) 987-3199.
- Volunteers in the Child Life Playroom: The playroom on the 2nd floor by the Train elevators has an infant play area and volunteers to give parents and caregivers a break. Call (206) 987-4433.

References

- Harvey MD, Karp (2002). *The Happiest Baby on the Block: The New Way to Calm Crying and Help Your Baby Sleep Longer*. New York, New York: Bantam Dell.

TO LEARN MORE

- **Child Life (206) 987-2037**
- **Your Child's Health-Care Provider**

Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Please call the Family Resource Center at (206) 987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health-care provider.