

HEALTH CHECKLIST

Things to check to make sure your baby is not unwell.

In most cases, long bouts of crying are not a result of a baby being ill.

However, it is important to check and reassure yourself that there really is nothing wrong. These are some of the things to look for:

- ***Signs of fever***

Colds and minor infections are common and may make your baby irritable. Check your baby's temperature. The NHS recommends using a digital thermometer touching the skin under your baby's armpit (not through clothes): see:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/fever-in-children/> A normal temperature is about 36.4C (97.5F) but this differs slightly from baby to baby. Over 37.5C (99.5F) is usually considered a fever.

- ***Food intolerance***

This is unlikely – only about 1% of babies cry a lot because they cannot tolerate cow's milk or other foods. But this can affect breast-fed babies as well as formula-fed ones. The following things may be signs that your baby has a food intolerance:

- Baby is not gaining weight as expected.
- Vomiting more than twice a day for several days. Bringing up a little feed is normal and should not worry you.
- Persistent diarrhoea. Passing watery, unformed poo every day for more than a few days.
- Persistent constipation. Babies vary a lot in how often they poo. The normal range is from several times each day to less than once a week. This makes it hard to know whether a baby is constipated. Please contact your Health Visitor or GP if you are worried about this.

- ***Your baby's gut bacteria***

Giving probiotic 'friendly bacteria' 'lactobacillus reuterii' to babies who cry a lot has reduced their crying in some, but not other, studies (see our News & Research pages for details). Currently, this evidence remains controversial and adding these bacteria to young babies' diets is not recommended in the UK by NICE*. As well as concern about infant safety, parents need to keep in mind that infant crying usually declines by 3-4 months of age without any treatment. Parents considering this treatment should always approach their GP for advice before starting and to monitor their baby's progress while using it.

- **Reflux, GOR and GORD**

Gastro-oesophageal reflux (GOR) is the passage of gastric contents into the oesophagus. The term 'GORD' is used where GOR is prolonged and serious enough to become a

disease. As noted above, bringing up some feed is normal in infants and several studies have shown that anti-reflux medications do not reduce infant crying. Parents with concerns about reflux should contact their GP.

- ***Other illnesses or physical disorders***

Physical disorders that can cause a baby to cry a lot without any fever do occur, but they are very rare. The NICE* website provides guidance for NHS professionals on symptoms which can help them to identify these rare cases: see <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/colic-infantile/> **Keep in mind**, though, that medical training is needed to interpret this complex information. If you are worried that your baby is unwell, always ask your Health Visitor or GP for guidance.

- ***Crying that sounds extremely high pitched***

This has been linked to physical disorders in babies by a small number of studies.

- ***Prolonged crying that occurs in infants who are 5 months of age or older***

This may be a sign that something more serious is wrong.

*The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) which advises the UK government on medical treatments.

What to do if you are concerned?

If you think your baby is ill, where the baby is showing signs of fever, is failing to gain weight, or showing other symptoms listed above, you should seek help from your Health Visitor or GP.

Where a baby does not show these symptoms, is under 5 months of age, and shows the signs of colic listed in ***Is it Colic?***, you can feel reassured your baby is probably in good health.

Click [here](#) to download a printable version of this Health Checklist.

Myth: "If my baby is crying, there must be something wrong"

Fact: Actually, babies cry for lots of reasons and sometimes for no obvious reason.

The average English baby cries and fusses for over 2 hours a day at around 5 weeks of age. Some cry more than this, some less. Research suggests there is nothing wrong with most babies crying a lot at this age. In fact, only 5 to 10% of babies taken to the doctor because of their crying are poorly. It's just what some normal babies do.

Still concerned about your baby's health? Click on the link to find details of who to contact if you still feel worried that your baby is ill.