

Newborn/Early Postpartum

Articles:

| | |
|---|------|
| The Baby Blues | p.1 |
| Newborn Babies and Sleep | p.5 |
| How to Have a Happy Marriage When You're Busy Being Parents | p.7 |
| Colic—Does Your Baby Have It? What Can You Do About It? | p.9 |
| How to Calm Your Crying Baby | p.12 |
| Postpartum Depression | p.15 |
| Wonderful Sounds for Sleep | p.18 |
| Handling Unwanted Advice | p.19 |
| Choosing a Baby Carrier | p.21 |

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The Baby Blues

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *Gentle Baby Care*

I remember when I was lying in my hospital bed after the birth of my fourth child, Coleton. I had endured a full day of labor and a difficult delivery (who says the fourth one comes easily?), and I was tired beyond explanation. After the relief of seeing my precious new child came an uncontrollable feeling to close my eyes and sleep. As my husband cradled newborn Coleton, I drifted off; my parting thoughts were, “I can’t do this. I don’t have the energy. How will I ever take care of a baby?” Luckily for me, a few hours of sleep, a supportive family, and lucky genes were all it took to feel normal again. But as many as 80% of new mothers experience a case of the baby blues that lasts for weeks after the birth of their baby. This isn’t something new mothers can control — there’s no place for blame. The most wonderful and committed mothers, even experienced mothers of more than one child, can get the baby blues.

What are baby blues?

Your baby’s birth has set into motion great changes in your body and in your life, and your emotions are reacting in a normal way. Dramatic hormonal shifts occur when a body goes from pregnant to not pregnant in a manner of minutes. Add to this your new title (Mommy!) and the responsibilities that go with it, and your blues are perfectly understandable. You’re not alone; this emotional letdown during the first few weeks is common after birth. Just remember that your state of mind has a physical origin and is exacerbated by challenging circumstances — and you and your body will adjust to both soon.

How do I know if I have the baby blues?

Every woman who experiences the baby blues (also called postpartum blues) does so in a different way. The most common symptoms include:

- Anxiety and nervousness
- Sadness or feelings of loss
- Stress and tension
- Impatience or a short temper
- Bouts of crying or tearfulness
- Mood swings
- Difficulty concentrating
- Trouble sleeping or excessive tiredness
- Not wanting to get dressed, go out, or clean up the house

Could it be more than just the baby blues?

If you're not sure whether you have the blues ask your doctor or midwife, and don't feel embarrassed: This is a question that health care providers hear often and with good reason. If you're feeling these symptoms to a degree that disrupts your normal level of function, if your baby is more than a few weeks old, or if you have additional symptoms — particularly feelings of resentment or rejection toward your baby or even a temptation to harm him — you may have more than the blues, you may have postpartum depression. *This is a serious illness that requires immediate treatment.* Please call a doctor or professional today. If you can't make the call, then please talk to your partner, your mother or father, a sibling or friend and ask them to arrange for help. Do this for yourself and for your baby. If you can't talk about it, hand this page it to someone close to you. It's that important. *You do not have to feel this way*, and safe treatment is available, even if you're breastfeeding.

How can I get rid of the blues?

While typical baby blues are fairly brief and usually disappear on their own, you can do a few things to help yourself feel better and get through the next few emotional days or weeks:

· **Give yourself time.** Grant yourself *permission* to take the time you need to become a mother. Pregnancy lasts nine months, the adoption process can take even longer, and your baby's actual birth is only a moment — but becoming a mother takes time. Motherhood is an immense responsibility. In my opinion, it is the most overwhelming, meaningful, incredible, *transforming* experience of a lifetime. No wonder it produces such emotional and physical change!

No other event of this magnitude would ever be taken lightly, so don't feel guilty for treating this time in your life as the very big deal it is. Remind yourself that it's okay (and necessary) to focus on this new aspect of your life and make it your number-one priority. Tending to a newborn properly takes time — all the time in his world. So, instead of feeling guilty or conflicted about your new focus, put your heart into getting to know this new little person. The world can wait for a few weeks.

Consider as objectively as you can just what you have accomplished: You have formed a new, entire person inside your own body and brought him forth; you have been party to a miracle. Or, if you've adopted, you've chosen to invite a miracle into your life and became an instant mother. You deserve a break and some space in which to just exist with your amazing little one, unfettered by outside concerns.

· **Talk to someone who understands.** Talk to a sibling, relative or friend with young children about what you are feeling. Someone who has experienced the baby blues can help you realize that they *are* temporary, and everything will be fine. A confidante can also serve as a checkpoint who can encourage you to seek help if he or she perceives that you need it.

• **Reach out and get out.** Simply getting out (if you are physically able and okayed for this by your health care provider) and connecting with people at large can go a long way toward reorienting your perspective. Four walls can close in very quickly, so change the scenery and head to the mall, the park, the library, a

coffeehouse — whatever place you enjoy. You'll feel a sense of pride as strangers ooh and ahh over your little one, and your baby will enjoy the stimulation, too.

· **Join a support group.** Joining a support group, either in person or online, can help you sort through your feelings about new motherhood. Take care to choose a group that aligns with your core beliefs about parenting a baby. As an example, if you are committed to breastfeeding, but most other members of the group are bottlefeeding, this may not be the best place for you, since your breastfeeding issues won't be understood and you won't find many helpful ideas among this group. If you have multiples, a premature baby, or a baby with special needs, for example, seek out a group for parents with babies like yours. And within those parameters, look for a group with your same overall parenting beliefs. Just because you *all* have twin babies doesn't mean you will all choose to parent them in the same way, so try to find like-minded new friends.

· **Tell Daddy what he can do to help.** It's very important that your spouse or partner be there for you right now. He may *want* to help you, but he may be unsure of how. Here are a few things that he can do for you — show him this list to help him help you:

- **Understand.** It's critical that your spouse or partner feel that you understand that she is going through a hormonally driven depression that she cannot control — and that she is not “just being grumpy.” Tell her you know this is normal, and that she'll be feeling better soon. Simply looking over this list and using some of the ideas will tell her a lot about your commitment to (and belief in) her.
- **Let her talk about her feelings.** Knowing she can talk to you about her feelings without being judged or criticized will help her feel much better.
- **Tend to the baby.** Taking care of your baby so Mommy can sleep or take a shower can give her a breath of fresh air. Have her nurse the baby and then you can take him for a walk (using a sling will keep Baby happy) or go on an outing. A benefit for you is that most babies love to be out and about and will enjoy this special time with you.
- **Step in to protect her.** If she's overwhelmed with visitors, kindly explain to company that she needs a lot of rest. Help her with whatever household duties usually fall to her (or get someone to help her) and do what you can to stay on top of yours. Worry about the house's cleanliness or laundry upkeep will do her no good whatsoever. If relatives offer to take the baby for a few hours, or to help with the house, take them up on it.
- **Tell her she's beautiful.** Most women feel depressed about the way they look after childbirth — because most still look four months pregnant! After changing so greatly to accommodate a baby's development, a woman's body takes months to regain any semblance of normalcy. Be patient with both her body and her feelings about it. Tell her what an amazing thing she's accomplished. Any compliments that acknowledge her unique beauty are sure to be greatly appreciated!
- **Tell her you love the baby.** Don't be bashful about gushing over the baby. Mommy loves to hear that you're enraptured with this new little member of your family.
- **Be affectionate, but be patient about sex.** With all that she's struggling with physically and emotionally, weeks may pass before she's ready for sex (even if she's had an OK after her checkup.) That doesn't mean she doesn't love you or need you — she just needs a little time to get back to the physical aspects of your sexual relationship.
- **Tell her you love her.** Even when she *isn't* feeling down, she needs to hear this — and right now it's more important for her health and well-being than ever.
- **Get support for you, too.** Becoming a father is a giant step in your life. Open up to a friend about how it feels to be a Dad, and do things that you enjoy, too. Taking care of yourself will help you take care of your new family.

Accept help from others. Family and friends are often happy to help if you just ask. When people say, “Let me know if I can do anything” they usually *mean* it. So, go ahead and ask kindly for what you want, whether

it's watching your baby so that you can nap, taking your older child to the park, helping you make a meal, or doing some laundry.

Get some sleep. Right now, sleeplessness will enhance your feelings of depression. So, take every opportunity to get some shuteye. Nap when the baby sleeps, go to bed early, and sleep in later in the morning if you can. If you are co-sleeping, take advantage of this special time when you don't have to get up out of bed to tend to your baby. And if your baby's sleep patterns are distressing to you then reach out to an experienced parent for help, or check out my book *The No-Cry Sleep Solution: Gentle Ways to Help Your Baby Sleep Through the Night*.

Don't fret about perfection right now. Household duties are not your top priority now — in fact, nothing aside from getting to know your baby is. Remember that people are coming to see your *baby*, not your *house*, so enjoy sharing your baby with visitors without worrying about a little clutter or dust. Simplify, prioritize, and delegate routine tasks, errands, and obligations.

Enjoy your job. If you work outside the home, then view your time at your job as an opportunity to refresh and prepare yourself to enjoy your baby fully when you are at home. Go ahead — talk about your baby and share pictures with your co-workers. Chances are, they'll love to hear about your new little one. This is a nice and appropriate way of indulging your natural instincts to focus on your baby when you can't be with her.

Get into exercising. *With your health care provider's approval*, start exercising with short walks or swims. Exercise will help you feel better in many ways both physical and emotional. Even if you didn't exercise before you had your baby, this is a great time to start. Studies prove that regular exercise helps combat depression, and it will help you regain your pre-baby body much more quickly.

Eat healthful foods. When the body isn't properly nourished, spirits can flag — particularly when the stress of recovery makes more nutritional demands. If you are breastfeeding, a nourishing diet is important for both you and your baby. Healthful foods, eaten in frequent meals, can provide the nutrition you need to combat the baby blues and give you the energy you need to handle your new role. And don't forget to drink water and other healthy fluids, especially if you're nursing! Dehydration can cause fatigue and headaches.

Take care of yourself. Parenting a new baby is an enormous responsibility, but things will fall into place for you and everything will seem easier given time. During this adjustment phase, try to do a few things for yourself. Simple joys like reading a book, painting your nails, going out to lunch with a friend or other ways in which you nourish your spirit can help you feel happier.

Love yourself. You are amazing: You've become mother to a beautiful new baby. You've played a starring role in the production of an incredible miracle. Be proud of what you've accomplished, and take the time to know and enjoy the strong, capable, multifaceted person you are becoming.

Newborn Babies and Sleep

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *The No-Cry Sleep Solution*

Congratulations on the birth of your new baby. This is a glorious time in your life – and a sleepless time too. Newborns have very different sleep needs than older babies. This article will help you understand your baby's developing sleep patterns, and will help you have reasonable expectations for sleep.

Read, Learn and Beware of Bad Advice

Absolutely *everyone* has an opinion about how you should handle sleep issues with your new baby. The danger to a new parent is that these tidbits of misguided advice (no matter how well-intentioned) can truly have a negative effect on our parenting skills and, by extension, our babies' development...*if we are not aware of the facts*. The more knowledge you have the less likely that other people will make you doubt your parenting decisions.

When you have your facts straight, and when you have a parenting plan, you will be able to respond with confidence to those who are well meaning but offering contrary or incorrect advice. So, your first step is to get smart! Know *what* you are doing, and know *why* you are doing it. Read books and magazines, attend classes or support groups – it all helps.

The Biology of Newborn Sleep

During the early months of your baby's life, he sleeps when he is tired, it's that simple. You can do little to force a new baby to sleep when he doesn't want to sleep, and conversely, you can do little to wake him up when he is sleeping soundly.

Newborn babies have very tiny tummies. They grow rapidly, their diet is liquid, and it digests quickly. Although it would be nice to lay your little bundle down at bedtime and not hear from him until morning, this is not a realistic goal for a tiny baby. Newborns need to be fed every two to four hours — and sometimes more.

Sleeping “through the night”

You may believe that babies should start "sleeping through the night" soon after birth. For a new baby, a *five-hour stretch* is a full night. Many (but not all) babies *can* sleep uninterrupted from midnight to 5 a.m. (Not that they always do.) This may be a far cry from what you may have thought "sleeping through the night" meant! What's more, some sleep-through-the-nighters will suddenly begin waking more frequently, and it's often a full year or even two until your baby will settle into an all-night, every night sleep pattern.

Falling Asleep at the Breast or Bottle

It is natural for a newborn to fall asleep while sucking at the breast, a bottle, or a pacifier. When a baby *always* falls asleep this way, he learns to associate sucking with falling asleep; over time, he cannot fall asleep any other way. This is probably the most natural, pleasant sleep association a baby can have. However, a large percentage of parents who are struggling with older babies who cannot fall asleep or stay asleep are fighting this powerful association.

Therefore, if you want your baby to be able to fall asleep without your help, it is essential that you *sometimes* let your newborn baby suck until he is sleepy, but not totally asleep. When you can, remove the breast, bottle, or pacifier from his mouth, and let him finish falling asleep without it. If you do this often enough, he will learn how to fall asleep without sucking.

Waking for Night Feedings

Many pediatricians recommend that parents shouldn't let a newborn sleep longer than four hours without feeding, and the majority of babies wake far more frequently than that. No matter what, your baby *will* wake up during the night. The key is to learn when you should pick her up for a feeding and when you can let her go back to sleep on her own.

Here's a tip that is important for you to know. Babies make many sleeping sounds, from grunts to whimpers to outright cries, and these noises don't always signal awakening. These are what I call *sleeping noises*, and your baby is asleep during these episodes.

Learn to differentiate between sleeping sounds and awake sounds. If she is awake and hungry, you'll want to feed her as quickly as possible so she'll go back to sleep easily. But if she's asleep – let her sleep!

Help Your Baby Distinguish Day from Night

A newborn sleeps sixteen to eighteen hours per day, and this sleep is distributed evenly over six to seven sleep periods. You can help your baby distinguish between night sleep and day sleep, and thus help him sleep longer periods at night. Have your baby take his daytime naps in a lit room where he can hear the noises of the day. Make nighttime sleep dark and quiet, except for white noise (a background hum). You can also help your baby differentiate day from night by using a nightly bath and a change into pajamas to signal the difference between the two.

Watch for Signs of Tiredness

Get familiar with your baby's sleepy signals and put her down to sleep as soon as she seems tired. A baby who is encouraged to stay awake when her body is craving sleep is an unhappy baby. Over time, this pattern develops into sleep deprivation, which complicates developing sleep maturity. Learn to read your baby's sleepy signs -- such as quieting down, losing interest in people and toys, and fussing -- and put her to bed when that window of opportunity presents itself.

Make Yourself Comfortable

It's a fact that your baby *will* be waking you up, so you may as well make yourself as comfortable as possible. Relax about night wakings right now. Being frustrated about having to get up won't change a thing. The situation will improve day by day; and before you know it, your newborn won't be so little anymore — she'll be walking and talking and getting into everything in sight...during the day, and sleeping peacefully all night long.

How to Have a Happy Marriage When You're Busy Being Parents

By Elizabeth Pantley, Author of *Kid Cooperation*, *Perfect Parenting* and *Hidden Messages*

Is your marriage everything you ever hoped it could be? Or has it been pushed down your list of priorities since having children? Let's face it, parenthood is a full-time job, and it dramatically changes your marriage relationship. But marriage is the foundation upon which your entire family is structured. If your marriage is strong, your whole family will be strong; your life will be more peaceful, you'll be a better parent, and you'll, quite simply, have more fun in your life.

Make a commitment

To create or maintain a strong marriage you will have to take the first critical step: *You must be willing to put time, effort and thought into nurturing your marriage.* The ideas that follow will help you follow through on this commitment and will put new life and meaning into your marriage. A wonderful thing may happen. You may fall in love with your spouse all over again. In addition, your children will greatly benefit from your stronger relationship. Children feel secure when they know that Mom and Dad love each other—particularly in today's world, where 50 percent of marriages end in divorce; half of your children's friends have gone, or are going through a divorce; or maybe it's your kids who have survived a divorce and are now living in a new family arrangement. Your children need daily proof that their family life is stable and predictable. When you make a commitment to your marriage, your children will feel the difference. No, they won't suffer from neglect! They'll blossom when your marriage—and their homelife—is thriving.

The surprising secret is that this doesn't have to take any extra time in your already busy schedule. Just a change in attitude plus a committed focus can yield a stronger, happier marriage.

So here's my challenge to you. Read the following suggestions and apply them in your marriage for the next 30 days. Then evaluate your marriage. I guarantee you'll both be happier.

Look for the good, overlook the bad

You married this person for many good reasons. Your partner has many wonderful qualities. Your first step in adding sizzle to your marriage is to look for the good and overlook the bad.

Make it a habit to ignore the little annoying things — dirty socks on the floor, a day-old coffee cup on the counter, worn out flannel pajamas, an inelegant burp at the dinner table — and choose instead to search for those things that make you smile: the way he rolls on the floor with the baby; the fact that she made your favorite cookies, the peace in knowing someone so well that you *can* wear your worn out flannels or burp at the table.

Give two compliments every day

Now that you've committed to seeing the good in your partner, it's time to say it! This is a golden key to your mate's heart. Our world is so full of negative input, and we so rarely get compliments from other people. When we do get a compliment, it not only makes us feel great about ourselves, it actually makes us feel great about the person giving the compliment! Think about it! When your honey says, "You're the best. I'm so glad I married you." It not only makes you feel loved, it makes you feel more loving.

Compliments are easy to give, take such a little bit of time, and they're free. Compliments are powerful; you just have to make the effort to say them. Anything works: "Dinner was great, you make my favorite sauce." "Thanks for picking up the cleaning. It was very thoughtful, you saved me a trip." "That sweater looks great on you."

Play nice

That may sound funny to you, but think about it. How many times do you see -- or experience -- partners treating each other in impolite, harsh ways that they'd never even treat a friend? Sometimes we take our partners for granted and unintentionally display rudeness. As the saying goes, if you have a choice between being right and being nice, just choose to be nice. Or to put this in the wise words of Bambi's friend Thumper, the bunny rabbit – "If you can't say somethin' nice don't say nothin' at all."

Pick your battles

How often have you heard this advice about parenting? This *is* great advice for child-rearing—and it's great advice to follow in your marriage as well. In any human relationship there will be disagreement and conflict. The key here is to decide which issues are worth pursuing and which are better off ignored. By doing this, you'll find much less negative energy between you. From now on, anytime you feel annoyed, take a minute to examine the issue at hand, and ask yourself a few questions. "How important is this?" "Is this worth picking a fight over?" "What would be the benefit of choosing this battle versus letting it go?"

The 60 second cuddle

You can often identify a newly married couple just by how much they touch each other — holding hands, sitting close, touching arms, kissing — just as you can spot an "oldly-married" couple by how little they touch. Mothers, in particular, often have less need for physical contact with their partners because their babies and young children provide so much opportunity for touch and cuddling that day's end finds them "touched fulfilled".

So here's a simple reminder: make the effort to touch your spouse more often. A pat, a hug, a kiss, a shoulder massage – the good feeling it produces for both of you far outweighs the effort.

Here's the deal: Whenever you've been apart make it a rule that you will take just 60 seconds to cuddle, touch and connect. This can be addictive! If you follow this advice soon you'll find yourselves touching each other more often, and increasing the romantic aspect of your relationship.

Spend more time talking to and listening to your partner

I don't mean, "Remember to pick up Jimmy's soccer uniform." Or "I have a PTA meeting tonight." Rather, get into the habit of sharing your thoughts about what you read in the paper, what you watch on TV, your hopes, your dreams, your concerns. Take a special interest in those things that your spouse is interested in and ask questions. And then listen to the answers.

Spend time with your spouse

It can be very difficult for your marriage to thrive if you spend all your time being "Mommy" and "Daddy". You need to spend regular time as "Husband" and "Wife". This doesn't mean you have to take a two-week vacation in Hawaii. (Although that might be nice, too!) Just take small daily snippets of time when you can enjoy uninterrupted conversation, or even just quiet companionship, without a baby on your hip, a child tugging your shirtsleeve or a teenager begging for the car keys. A daily morning walk around the block or a shared cup of tea after all the children are in bed might work wonders to re-connect you to each other. And yes, it's quite fine to talk about your children when you're spending your time together, because, after all, your children are one of the most important connections you have in your relationship.

When you and your spouse regularly connect in a way that nurtures your relationship, you may find a renewed love between you, as well as a refreshed vigor that will allow you to be a better, more loving parent. You owe it to yourself — and to your kids — to nurture your relationship. So take my challenge and use these ideas for the next 30 days. And watch your marriage take on a whole new glow.

Colic – Does Your Baby Have It? What Can You Do About It?

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *Gentle Baby Care* and *The No-Cry Sleep Solution*

You may have heard the term colic applied to any baby who cries a great deal. Not all crying babies have colic, but all colicky babies cry — and they cry hard. They may stiffen their little bodies, or curl up as if in pain. They may cry so hard that they don't seem like they even know you are there. When babies cry like this, they take in a lot of air, which creates gas and more pain, which makes them cry even more.

Researchers are still unsure of colic's exact cause. Some experts believe that colic is related to the immaturity of a baby's digestive system. Others theorize that a baby's immature nervous system and inability to handle the constant sensory stimulation that surrounds her cause a breakdown by the end of the day, when colic most often occurs.

Dr. Harvey Karp, in his book *The Happiest Baby on the Block* (Bantam Books, 2002) introduced a new theory. He believes that babies are born three months too early, and that some babies find their new world too difficult to handle. They yearn for the comforting conditions that occurred in the womb.

Whatever the cause, and it may be a combination of all the theories; colic is among the most exasperating conditions that parents of new babies face. Colic occurs only to newborn babies, up to about four to five months of age. Symptoms include:

- A regular period of nonstop, inconsolable crying, typically late in the day
- Crying bouts that last one to three hours or more
- A healthy and happy disposition at all other times of the day

Can colic be prevented?

Given that we aren't sure what causes colic, we don't know if it can be prevented. Even if you do everything "right" and take all the steps to discourage colic, it still may happen. If you think your baby has colic, talk with your pediatrician and take your baby in for a checkup to rule out any medical cause for your baby's crying. If your baby is given a clean bill of health, then you'll know colic is the culprit in the daily crying bouts.

Since colic occurs in newborns, parents often feel that they are doing something wrong to create the situation. Their vulnerability and lack of experience puts them in the position of questioning their own ability to take care of their baby. Hearing your baby cry with colic, and not knowing why it's happening or what to do about it is painful for you; I know this because one of my four children suffered with colic. Although many years have passed since then (Angela is now 15), I remember it vividly. Hearing my baby cry night after night and not knowing how to help her was gut wrenching, heartbreaking, and frustrating. The most important piece of research I discovered was this: *It's not your fault*. Any baby can have colic.

Things that may help your baby

Remember that nothing you do will eliminate colic *completely* until your baby's system is mature and able to settle on its own. That said, experienced parents and professionals can offer ways to help your baby though this time — ask around! I did, and from what I uncovered, I compiled the following suggestions for helping your baby feel better. Look for patterns to your baby's crying; these can provide clues as to which suggestions are most likely to help. Stick with an idea for a few days to see if it helps. Watch for any signs of improvement (not necessarily complete quiet). If the particular course of action doesn't seem to change anything, don't get discouraged — just try something else:

- If breastfeeding, feed on demand (cue feeding), for nutrition as well as comfort, as often as your baby needs a calming influence.
- If breastfeeding, try avoiding foods that may cause gas in your baby. Eliminate one possible cause for a few days and see if it makes a difference. The most common baby tummy offenders are dairy products, caffeine, cabbage, broccoli and other gassy vegetables. But don't assume the culprit, if there is one, will be obvious: I know one mother whose baby reacted loudly and consistently after any meal that included eggplant, asparagus or onions.
- If bottlefeeding, offer more frequent but smaller meals; experiment with different formulas with your doctor's approval.
- If bottlefeeding, try different types of bottles and nipples that prevent air from entering your baby as he drinks, such as those with curved bottles or collapsible liners.
- Hold your baby in a more upright position for feeding and directly afterwards.
- Experiment with how often and when you burp your baby.
- Offer meals in a quiet setting.
- If baby likes a pacifier, offer him one.
- Invest in a baby sling or carrier and use it during colicky periods.
- If the weather's too unpleasant for an outside stroll, bring your stroller in the house and walk your baby around.
- Give your baby a warm bath.
- Place a warm towel or wrapped water bottle on baby's tummy (taking caution that the temperature is warm but not hot).
- Hold your baby with her legs curled up toward her belly.
- Massage your baby's tummy, or give him a full massage.
- Swaddle your baby in a warm blanket.
- Lay your baby tummy down across your lap and massage or pat her back.
- Hold your baby in a rocking chair, or put him in a swing.
- Walk with Baby in a quiet, dark room while you hum or sing.
- Try keeping your baby away from highly stimulating situations during the day when possible to prevent sensory overload, and understand that a particularly busy day may mean a fussier evening.
- Lie on your back and lay your baby on top of your tummy down while massaging his back. (Transfer your baby to his bed if he falls asleep.)
- Take Baby for a ride in the car.
- Play soothing music or turn on white noise such as a vacuum cleaner or running water, or play a CD of nature sounds.
- As a last resort, ask your doctor about medications available for colic and gas.

Tips for coping

As difficult as colic is for a baby, it is just as challenging for the parents. This can be especially hard for a mother who has other children to care for, who has returned to work, or who is suffering from the baby blues or postpartum depression. Even if everything else in life is perfect, colic is taxing. Here are a few things you can do to take some of the stress out of these colicky times:

- Know that your baby *will* cry during his colicky time, and while you can do things to make your baby more comfortable, nothing you can do will *totally* stop the crying. This is *not* a result of anything you've done or not done.
- Plan outings for the times of day when baby is usually happy, or if outings keep your baby happy, plan them for the colicky times.
- Take advantage of another person's offer to take a turn with the baby, even if it's just so that you can take a quiet bath or shower.
- Keep reminding yourself that this is only temporary; it will pass.
- Avoid keeping a long to-do list right now; only do what's most important.
- Talk to other parents of colicky babies so you can share ideas and comfort each other.

- If the crying is getting to you and making you tense or angry, put your baby in his crib, or give him to someone else to hold for a while so that you don't accidentally shake or harm your baby. (Shaking a baby can cause permanent brain damage, so if you feel angry, and colic can do that to you, put your baby down.)
- Know that babies do not suffer long-term harm from having colic.

When should I call the doctor?

Anytime you are concerned about your baby, call your doctor. That goes for anything concerning your precious little one. In the case of colic, be sure to make that call if you notice any of the following:

- Your baby's crying is accompanied by vomiting.
- Your baby is not gaining weight.
- The colicky behavior lasts longer than four months.
- Your baby seems to be in pain.
- Your baby has a fever.
- Your baby doesn't want to be held or handled.
- The crying spree isn't limited to one bout in the evening.
- Your baby does not have regular bowel movements or wet diapers.
- You notice other problems that don't appear on the previous list of symptoms.
- Your baby's crying is making you angry or depressed.

How to Calm Your Crying Baby

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *Gentle Baby Care*

When we're pregnant or awaiting adoption, we dream about our baby-to-be, we always envision those beautiful Hallmark card scenes: charming baby smiling up at peaceful mother's face. We read books in advance of the big day about how care for a newborn — how to bathe, feed and dress her — and then we feel somewhat prepared. However, a crying baby was never part of that idyllic vision, so this takes us by surprise. But the fact is, all babies cry at one time or another. Some babies cry more than others, but they all do cry. Understanding *why* babies cry can help you get through this phase and respond effectively to your crying baby — so can the list of ideas that follows.

Why does my baby cry?

Simply put, babies cry because they cannot talk. Babies are human beings, and they have needs and desires, just as we do, but they can't express them. Even if they could talk, very often they wouldn't understand why they feel the way they do, they wouldn't understand themselves well enough to articulate their needs, so babies need someone to help them figure it all out. Their cries are the only way they can say, "Help me! Something isn't right here!"

Different kinds of cries

As you get to know your baby, you'll become the expert in understanding his cries in a way that no one else can. In their research, child development professionals have determined that certain types of cries mean certain things. In other words, babies don't cry the same exact way every time. (Other child development experts, also known as mothers, have known that for millennia.) Over time, you'll recognize particular cries as if they were spoken words. In addition to these cry signals, you often can determine why your baby is crying by the situation surrounding the cry. Following are common reasons for Baby's cry, and the clues that may tell you what's up:

Hunger: If three or four hours have passed since his last feeding, if he has just woken up, or if he has just had a very full diaper and he begins to cry, he's probably hungry. A feeding will most likely stop the crying.

Tiredness: Look for these signs: decreased activity, losing interest in people and toys, rubbing eyes, looking glazed, and the most obvious — yawning. If you notice any of these in your crying baby, she may just need to sleep. Time for bed!

Discomfort: If a baby is uncomfortable — too wet, hot, cold, squished — he'll typically squirm or arch his back when he cries, as if trying to get away from the source of his discomfort. Try to figure out the source of his distress and solve his problem.

Pain: A cry of pain is sudden and shrill, just like when an adult or older child cries out when they get hurt. It may include long cries followed by a pause during which your baby appears to stop breathing. He then catches his breath and lets out another long cry. Time to check your baby's temperature and undress him for a full-body examination.

Overstimulation: If the room is noisy, people are trying to get your baby's attention, rattles are rattling, music boxes are playing, and your baby suddenly closes her eyes and cries (or turns her head away), she may be trying to shut out all that's going on around her and find some peace. It's time for a quiet, dark room and some peaceful cuddles.

Illness: When your baby is sick, he may cry in a weak, moaning way. This is his way of saying, “I feel awful.” If your baby seems ill, look for any signs of sickness, take her temperature and call your healthcare provider.

Frustration: Your baby is just learning how to control her hands, arms, and feet. She may be trying to get her fingers into her mouth or to reach a particularly interesting toy, but her body isn’t cooperating. She cries out of frustration, because she can’t accomplish what she wants to do. All she needs is a little help.

Loneliness: If your baby falls asleep feeding and you place her in her crib, but she wakes soon afterward with a cry, she may be saying that she misses the warmth of your embrace and doesn’t like to be alone. A simple situation to resolve...

Worry or fear: Your baby suddenly finds himself in the arms of Great Aunt Matilda and can’t see you; his previously happy gurgles turn suddenly to crying. He’s trying to tell you that he’s scared: He doesn’t know this new person, and he wants Mommy or Daddy. Explain to Auntie that he needs a little time to warm up to someone new, and try letting the two of them get to know each other while Baby stays in your arms.

Boredom: Your baby has been sitting in his infant seat for 20 minutes while you talk and eat lunch with a friend. He’s not tired, hungry or uncomfortable, but he starts a whiny, fussy cry. He may be saying that he’s bored and needs something new to look at or touch. A new position for his seat or a toy to hold may help.

Colic: If your baby cries inconsolably for long periods every day, particularly at the same time each day, he may have colic. Researchers are still unsure of colic’s exact cause. Some experts believe that colic is related to the immaturity of a baby’s digestive system. Whatever the cause, and it may be a combination of all the theories; colic is among the most exasperating conditions that parents of new babies face. Colic occurs only to newborn babies, up to about four to five months of age. Look for patterns to your baby’s crying; these can provide clues as to which suggestions are most likely to help. Then experiment with some of the ideas in this list and in the rest of this article.

- If breastfeeding, feed on demand (cue feeding), for nutrition as well as comfort, as often as your baby needs a calming influence.
- If breastfeeding, try avoiding foods that may cause gas in your baby, such as dairy products, caffeine, cabbage, broccoli and other gassy vegetables.
- If bottlefeeding, offer more frequent but smaller meals; experiment with different formulas with your doctor or health care provider’s approval.
- If bottlefeeding, try different types of bottles and nipples that prevent air from entering your baby as he drinks, such as those with curved bottles or collapsible liners.
- Hold your baby in a more upright position for feeding and directly afterwards.
- Experiment with how often and when you burp your baby.
- Offer meals in a quiet setting.
- If baby likes a pacifier, offer him one.
- Invest in a baby sling or carrier and use it during colicky periods.
- If the weather’s too unpleasant for an outside stroll, bring your stroller in the house and walk your baby around.
- Give your baby a warm bath.
- Hold your baby with her legs curled up toward her belly.
- Massage your baby’s tummy, or give him a full massage.
- Swaddle your baby in a warm blanket.
- Lay your baby tummy down across your lap and massage or pat her back.
- Hold your baby in a rocking chair, or put him in a swing.
- Walk with Baby in a quiet, dark room while you hum or sing.
- Try keeping your baby away from highly stimulating situations during the day when possible to prevent sensory overload.

- Lie on your back and lay your baby on top of your tummy down while massaging his back. (Transfer your baby to his bed if he falls asleep.)
- Take Baby for a ride in the car.
- Play soothing music or turn on white noise such as a vacuum cleaner or running water.
- As a last resort, ask your doctor or health care provider about medications available for colic and gas.

What about fussy crying?

There are plenty of times when you can't tell if your baby's crying is directly related to a fixable situation: hunger, a soiled diaper, or a longing to be held. That's when parents get frustrated and nervous. That's when you should take a deep breath and try some of the following cry-stoppers:

Hold your baby. No matter the reason for your baby's cry, being held by a warm and comforting person offers a feeling of security and may calm his crying. Babies love to be held in arms, slings, front-pack carriers, and (when they get a little older) backpacks; physical contact is what they seek and what usually soothes them best.

Breastfeed your baby. Nursing your baby is as much for comfort as food. All four of my babies calmed easily when brought to the breast — so much so that my husband has always called it “The Secret Weapon.” And my babies are very typical. Breastfeeding is an important and powerful tool for baby soothing.

Provide motion. Babies enjoy repetitive, rhythmic motion such as rocking, swinging, swaying, jiggling, dancing or a drive in the car. Many parents instinctually begin to sway with a fussy baby, and for a good reason: It works.

Turn on some white noise. The womb was a very noisy place. Remember the sounds you heard on the Doppler stethoscope? Not so long ago, your baby heard those 24 hours a day. Therefore, your baby sometimes can be calmed by “white noise” — that is, noise that is continuous and uniform, such as that of a heartbeat, the rain, static between radio stations, and your vacuum cleaner. Some alarm clocks even have a white noise function.

Let music soothe your baby. Soft, peaceful music is a wonderful baby calmer. That's why lullabies have been passed down through the ages. You don't have to be a professional singer to provide your baby with a song; your baby loves to hear your voice. In addition to your own songs, babies usually love to hear any kind of music. Experiment with different types of tunes, since babies have their own favorites that can range from jazz to country to classical, and even rock and rap.

Swaddle your baby. During the first three or four months of life, many babies feel comforted if you can re-create the tightly contained sensation they enjoyed in the womb.

Massage your baby. Babies love to be touched and stroked, so a massage is a wonderful way to calm a fussy baby. A variation of massage is the baby pat; many babies love a gentle, rhythmic pat on their backs or bottoms.

Let your baby have something to suck on. The most natural pacifier is mother's breast, but when that isn't an option, a bottle, pacifier, Baby's own fingers, a teething toy, or Daddy's pinkie can work wonders as a means of comfort.

Distract your baby. Sometimes a new activity or change of scenery — maybe a walk outside, or a dance with a song, or a splashy bath — can be very helpful in turning a fussy baby into a happy one.

Reading your baby's body language

Many times, you can avoid the crying altogether by responding right away to your baby's earliest signals of need, such as fussing, stiffening her body, or rooting for the breast. As you get to know your baby and learn her signals, determining what she needs will become easier for you — even before she cries.

Postpartum Depression

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *Gentle Baby Care* and *The No-Cry Sleep Solution*

QUESTION: I know that it's normal to have the "baby blues" right after you have a baby, but my son is six weeks old. I thought everything would be wonderful by now and I would be so in love with my baby. I thought mothering would come easily. It's not that way at all! I can't sleep, even when he's sleeping. I feel hollow inside, like the real me is gone. Sometimes I cry for hours; other times, I feel angry enough to explode. Life feels like an endless amusement park ride, and sometimes I just want to get off. Why am I such a terrible mother?

Learn about it

You're *not* a terrible mother! You are a mother who is suffering from a condition known as postpartum depression, a condition that is treatable. While as many as 80% of mothers experience a temporary and mild condition referred to as the baby blues, up to 15% of women have the more severe reaction you're experiencing. Having PPD doesn't mean that you have done something wrong, or that something is wrong with you; it is an illness and it can be cured. Once you learn more about what's causing your despondent emotions and take some steps toward treatment, you'll be on the road to finding yourself again and enjoying your baby.

What is postpartum depression?

PPD is a medical condition — a specific type of depression that occurs within the first few months after childbirth. It is caused by the biochemical and hormonal changes that happen in the body after pregnancy and birth...nothing that is within your control.

What are the symptoms of postpartum depression?

While PPD affects all women differently, a few typical symptoms can help your physician make the diagnosis. You probably are not experiencing *everything* on the following list, and the degree of symptoms may range from mild to severe, but if a number of these apply to you, you may be suffering from PPD.

Symptoms of postpartum depression may include but are not limited to:

- Feeling hopeless, worthless or inadequate
- Frequent crying or tearfulness
- Insomnia or sleepiness
- Lack of energy
- Loss of pleasure in activities you normally enjoy
- Difficulty doing typical daily chores
- Loss of appetite
- Feelings of sadness and despair
- Feelings of guilt, panic or confusion
- Feelings of anger or anxiety
- Extreme mood swings
- Memory loss
- Overconcern for baby
- Fear of "losing control"
- Lack of interest in sex
- Worrying that you may hurt your baby
- A desire to escape from your baby or your family
- Withdrawal from social circles and routines

- Thoughts about hurting yourself

If you suffer from extreme degrees of any of these symptoms, particularly thoughts about hurting yourself or your baby, or if you have additional physical symptoms such as hallucinations, confusion or paranoia, then please call a doctor today. *NOW*. Your condition requires immediate medical care. If you can't make the call, then please talk to your partner, your mother or father, a sibling or close friend and ask them to help you arrange for help. Do this for yourself and for your baby. If you can't talk about it, rip this page out and hand it to someone close to you. It's that important. *You do not have to feel this way.*

What can a doctor do about postpartum depression?

As with any form of depression, help is available and only as far away as your healthcare provider — contact your ob/gyn or midwife to start with, if that's most comfortable for you. She can help you get the professional care you need from someone who has experience dealing with this condition. In the longer term, it's important that your therapy take place with a professional who has experience in treating PPD; the malady is different from other forms of depression, and it is very specifically related to your role as a new mother.

PARENT TIP

"In the time it takes you to read this chapter, you could set up an appointment with a doctor. Remember, this is a medical problem and it can be serious; for your sake, for your baby, and for all those who love you, you must make that call. With help, you will regain your life and your perspective."

- Vanessa, mother of Kimmy (12) Tyler (10) Rachel (5) and Zachary (3)

A visit to a doctor for the symptoms you're feeling is nothing to fear. Your condition is something your doctor has seen before — so you need not feel at all self-conscious. As for treatment, there are a variety of options, depending on how severe your symptoms are. Your doctor will evaluate your condition and may suggest medication, such as antidepressants. (Make sure that you let him know if you are breastfeeding so that the proper medication can be prescribed.) In addition, he will tell you that therapy and support are critical for recovery.

What can I do about PPD?

The first step you can take is to understand that you have an illness that requires action on your part so you can heal. Forgive me for repeating this, but it is important: Take that first step and call a doctor. In addition, the following things can help you begin to feel better right away:

Talk to someone. Whom do you trust? Whom do you feel comfortable talking to? This might be your spouse or partner, it might be your mother, your sister or brother or a friend. It can really help to share your feelings with someone who cares about you. Even if you feel you can't talk specifically about PPD, just discuss your feelings and your new role as a mother and its effects on you.

Read books about baby care and parenting. Knowledge is power. Reading may help you feel more confident, which in turn will help you feel more in control of your situation. It will also give you the knowledge you'll need to ward off the unwanted advice or criticism that can come your way during the early months of parenting, and that can be especially hard to take when you are feeling depressed.

Join a support group. PPD support groups allow mothers who are dealing with depression to talk with others who have similar feelings. A list at the end of this section can help you find a group in your area. You might also call your health care provider, your local hospital, or your church for information. While PPD support groups are an excellent choice, any group for new mothers in which you can share your feelings about motherhood can help you feel better about yourself. Choose your support group with care, as you'll want to be around people who support your parenting decisions. Being with a group who criticizes or questions your mothering choices will make you feel worse, not better. Conversely, spending your time with

like-minded people will boost your self-confidence and help you feel more confident as a mother. This idea shouldn't be seen as a cure, but rather one part of the process of recovery.

Accept help from others. If anyone offers to help you — whether it is to take your baby for a walk, cook a meal, or drive your older kids to sports practice — accept! Learn to say *yes*. You don't have to do everything to be a good mother. It's natural for human beings to lean on each other, so go ahead and do a little more leaning.

Get some extra sleep. Put your efforts to get your baby to sleep through the night on hold right now; this will come in time. Forget about the clock. Just sleep — both of you — whenever you can. Extra sleep will help you feel better.

Relax your standards. This is not the time to worry about a spotless house, gourmet meals, the corporate ladder, or your manicure. Try to stick to the basics and concentrate on yourself and your baby.

Get some fresh air. When possible, put your baby in the sling or the stroller and take a walk. The exercise and open spaces will help you feel more energized. Try to work a daily stroll into your schedule. If you have older children, walk them to school. If the weather isn't suitable for outdoor walking, then drive to a shopping mall for an indoor walk.

Feed yourself healthy foods. You can eat properly without much effort. Focus on fresh fruits and vegetables, and simple but nutritious meals. And eat frequently. Going long stretches without food wreaks havoc on your system. Simple snacks like an apple with peanut butter, a bagel, or yogurt with cottage cheese are easy to prepare and prevent your blood sugar from dipping and adding to your feelings of depression. Continue to take vitamins, and drink plenty of water.

Love yourself. You are going to be okay. Take it one step at a time...but do take steps (such as those outlined in this section). With help and time, you'll develop a refreshing and healthy outlook on your new role as a mother.

For more information

Books

This Isn't What I Expected: Overcoming Postpartum Depression, by Karen Kleiman and Valerie Davis Raskin (Bantam Books, 1994)

Beyond The Blues: Prenatal and Postpartum Depression, A Treatment Manual by Shoshana Bennett and Pec Indman (Moodswings Press, 2002)

The No-Cry Sleep Solution: Gentle Ways to Help Your Baby Sleep Through the Night
By Elizabeth Pantley (McGraw-Hill, 2002)

Web sites

Pacific Post Partum Support Society
www.postpartum.org

Depression After Delivery, Inc.
www.depressionafterdelivery.com

To locate a support group

Postpartum Support International
www.chss.iup.edu/postpartum

Postpartum Education for Parents
www.sbpep.org

La Leche League Support Groups

Wonderful Sounds for Sleep

By Elizabeth Pantley, Author of *The No-Cry Sleep Solution*

The environment that your baby enjoyed for nine long months in the womb was not one of absolute quiet. There was a constant symphony of sound -- your heartbeat and fluids rushing in and out of the placenta. (Remember those sounds from when you listened to your baby's heartbeat with the Doppler stethoscope?) Research indicates that "white noise" sounds or soft bedtime music helps many babies to relax and fall asleep more easily. This is most certainly because these sounds create an environment more familiar to your baby than a very quiet room.

Many people enjoy using soothing music as their baby's sleep sound. If you do, choose bedtime music carefully. Some music (including jazz and much classical music) is too complex and stimulating. For music to be soothing to your baby, pick simple, repetitive, predictable music, like traditional lullabies. Tapes created especially for putting babies to sleep are great choices. Pick something that *you* will enjoy listening to night after night, too. (Using a tape player with an automatic repeat function is helpful for keeping the music going as long as you need it to play.)

There are widely available, and very lovely, "nature sounds" tapes that work nicely, too, as well those small sound-generating or white-noise devices and clocks you may have seen in stores. The sounds on these -- raindrops, a bubbling brook or running water -- often are similar to those sounds your baby heard in utero. A ticking clock or a bubbling fish tank also make wonderful white-noise options.

"I went out today and bought a small aquarium and the humming noise does seem to relax Chloe and help her to sleep. I didn't buy any fish though. Who has time to take care of fish when you're half asleep all day?"
Tanya, mother of 13-month-old Chloe

You can find some suitable tapes and CDs made especially for babies or those made for adults to listen to when they want to relax. Whatever you choose, listen to it first and ask yourself: Does this relax me? Would it make me feel sleepy if I listened to it in bed?

If you must put your baby to sleep in a noisy, active house full of people, keeping the tape running (auto rewind) will help mask baby-waking noises like dishes clanking, people talking, siblings giggling, TV, dogs barking, etc. This can also help transition your sleeping baby from a noisy daytime house to which he's become accustomed subconsciously to one of absolute nighttime quiet.

Once your baby is familiar with his calming noise, or music, you can use these to help your baby fall back to sleep when he wakes up in the middle of the night. Simply sooth him by playing the music (very quietly) during the calming and falling-asleep time. If he wakes and cries, repeat this process.

If your baby gets used to his sleep time sounds you can take advantage of this and take the tape with you if you will be away from home for naptime or bedtime. The familiarity of these sounds will help your baby sleep in an unfamiliar environment.

Eventually your baby will rely on this technique less and less to fall and stay asleep. Don't feel you must rush the process; there is no harm in your baby falling asleep to these gentle sounds. When you are ready to wean him of these you can help this process along by reducing the volume by a small amount every night until you finally don't turn the music or sounds on at all. Babies enjoy these peaceful sounds, and they are just one more piece in the puzzle that helps you to help your baby sleep -- gently, without any crying at all.

For more information: <http://www.pantley.com/elizabeth>

Handling Unwanted Advice

By Elizabeth Pantley, Author of *Gentle Baby Care*

“Help! I’m getting so frustrated with the endless stream of advice I get from my mother-in-law and brother! No matter what I do, I’m doing it wrong. I love them both, but how do I get them to stop dispensing all this unwanted advice?”

Just as your baby is an important part of your life, he is also important to others. People who care about your baby are bonded to you and your child in a special way that invites their counsel. Knowing this may give you a reason to handle the interference gently, in a way that leaves everyone’s feelings intact.

Regardless of the advice, it is *your* baby, and in the end, you will raise your child the way that you think best. So it’s rarely worth creating a war over a well-meaning person’s comments. You can respond to unwanted advice in a variety of ways:

Listen first

It’s natural to be defensive if you feel that someone is judging you; but chances are you are not being criticized; rather, the other person is sharing what they feel to be valuable insight. Try to listen - you may just learn something valuable.

Disregard

If you know that there is no convincing the other person to change her mind, simply smile, nod, and make a non-committal response, such as, “Interesting!” Then go about your own business...your way.

Agree

You might find one part of the advice that you agree with. If you can, provide wholehearted agreement on that topic.

Pick your battles

If your mother-in-law insists that Baby wear a hat on your walk to the park, go ahead and pop one on his head. This won’t have any long-term effects except that of placating her. However, don’t capitulate on issues that are important to you or the health or well-being of your child.

Steer clear of the topic

If your brother is pressuring you to let your baby cry to sleep, but you would never do that, then don’t complain to him about your baby getting you up five times the night before. If *he* brings up the topic, then distraction is definitely in order, such as, “Would you like a cup of coffee?”

Educate yourself

Knowledge is power; protect yourself and your sanity by reading up on your parenting choices. Rely on the confidence that you are doing your best for your baby.

Educate the other person

If your “teacher” is imparting information that you know to be outdated or wrong, share what you’ve learned on the topic. You may be able to open the other person’s mind. Refer to a study, book, or report that you have read.

Quote a doctor

Many people accept a point of view if a professional has validated it. If your own pediatrician agrees with your position, say, “My doctor said to wait until she’s at least six months before starting solids.” If your *own* doctor doesn’t back your view on that issue, then refer to another doctor - perhaps the author of a baby care book.

Be vague

You can avoid confrontation with an elusive response. For example, if your sister asks if you've started potty training yet (but you are many months away from even starting the process), you can answer with, "We're moving in that direction."

Ask for advice!

Your friendly counselor is possibly an expert on a few issues that you can agree on. Search out these points and invite guidance. She'll be happy that she is helping you, and you'll be happy you have a way to avoid a showdown about topics that you *don't* agree on.

Memorize a standard response

Here's a comment that can be said in response to almost any piece of advice: "This may not be the right way for you, but it's the right way for *me*."

Be honest

Try being honest about your feelings. Pick a time free of distractions and choose your words carefully, such as, "I know how much you love Harry, and I'm glad you spend so much time with him. I know you think you're helping me when you give me advice about this, but I'm comfortable with my own approach, and I'd really appreciate if you'd understand that."

Find a mediator

If the situation is putting a strain on your relationship with the advice-giver, you may want to ask another person to step in for you.

Search out like-minded friends

Join a support group or on-line club with people who share your parenting philosophies. Talking with others who are raising their babies in a way that is similar to your own can give you the strength to face people who don't understand your viewpoints.

Choosing a Baby Carrier

By Elizabeth Pantley, Author of *Gentle Baby Care*

Most parents find a baby carrier to be invaluable during the first year of their baby's life. There are many types and styles to choose from. The different types of baby carriers fall into three main categories: slings, front packs and backpacks.

Slings

These are made of fabric and are available in a wide variety of styles. They “sling” sash-style over your shoulder to hold baby in front of you. Slings offer many benefits to both baby and parent. Here are some of the most commonly cited by experienced sling-users:

- A sling is perfect for the newborn months, when Baby needs to be held often in your arms, as opposed to being pushed at arm's length in a stroller.
- A sling is an excellent way to carry your baby around the house because it keeps your baby happy while leaving your two arms free to go about your daily tasks.
- Sling carriers are multi-purpose. You can use them to carry your baby, to create privacy for breastfeeding, and to cover your sleeping baby. Some feature a tail that can double as a blanket or coverup.
- Putting your baby into (and getting him back out of) a sling is a breeze. You can even get a sleeping baby in and out of one of these soft carriers without waking her.
- You can carry your baby in a variety of positions.
- Slings are small, lightweight and easy to transport.
- Slings are wonderful to use when a stroller would be inconvenient, such as up stairs, through large crowds or narrow aisle ways, or over rough terrain — or when you'll be going in and out of the car frequently.
- Slings put your baby at the height of people's faces instead of at their knees.
- You can use a sling right up through toddlerhood, when little legs get tired of walking.

An important note about baby slings: They can be confusing to use at first, and your baby can slide out of the bottom if not positioned correctly. Try to find an experienced sling-user, a how-to video, or a knowledgeable sales clerk to help you master the art of baby slinging. Your local La Leche League leader may be able to offer pointers, too.

Slings are very much worth the effort. I bought a sling when my second baby, Vanessa, was born. I couldn't figure it out, so I left it in the closet. When my third baby, David, was born, I attended a mother-baby class, learned how to use my sling — and was immediately hooked! I used slings extensively with my third and fourth babies and found them to be a marvelous baby care tool.

PARENT TIP

“I put my newborn in the sling so I could sit in bed at night with my toddler and read books. It kept us all together, my hands free and gave reading time to BOTH boys!”
Amy, mother of AJ (4) and Ryder (2)

Front packs

Front pack carriers are similar to slings in use but are more complex in their structure. They have a seat that attaches to the front of you with straps that crisscross behind you; these straps secure the carrier to your body. Here's what you need to know about front packs:

- The benefits of front packs are similar to many of those of slings, such as their light weight and portability, and the fact that you can carry your baby while keeping your arms and hands free.
- Some allow you to choose between carrying your baby facing inward toward you or outward, facing the world – which is often fun for older babies.
- Settling the baby into and out of the carrier require more steps than a sling does.
- Moving a sleeping baby into or out of the carrier is difficult, unless the seat unbuckles separately from the harness.
- Front packs are better suited to a baby who is strong enough to hold his head upright.

Backpacks

A back carrier is similar to a camping backpack. It has a seat for your baby that attaches to your back with a frame and straps that cross over your shoulders. A few things to know about backpacks:

- They're perfect for an older baby who loves to look around and be carried high on your shoulders.
- Many backpacks have pouches for holding supplies.
- Some models have a canopy for inclement weather or sun protection.
- Getting a backpack off (and putting it on) are typically two-person tasks.
- Backpacks are best for an older baby who can sit up well.
- They're great for an all-day trip, such as hiking, shopping or visiting an amusement park

How do you decide which carrier to use?

No single baby carrier is perfect for all parents. Every parent has different needs, preferences and proportions. Many people actually begin with one type of carrier and move on to another when their babies get older.

First, think about how you plan to use a carrier. Will you use it primarily at home, instead of a stroller while away from home, or both? Do you already have a stroller, or must your carrier fill all your baby-carrying needs? Defining its purpose will help you choose which carrier is best for you. Read the package information (or talk to other parents who own a similar carrier) to learn which purposes it serves best and to determine if it matches your needs.

The very best way to decide? Try carriers on — either at the store or with a friend who owns one. Actually putting your baby in the carrier will give you the best idea as to fit, but if you are shopping without your baby (or don't have your baby yet!) try using a stuffed animal from the toy department.

PARENT TIP

“A baby carrier can help new adoptive parents to decline politely those who want to hold your baby while he still needs exclusive Mommy or Daddy contact. The carrier can be especially helpful in difficult situations such as visits to your child's orphanage or former foster parents.”*

¾ Laurel, mother of 16-month-old Crystal

* This is also an excellent idea for parents who blanch at the thought of their tiny newborn being passed around the room from person to person!

Points to consider when purchasing a carrier:

- *Comfort.* Does the carrier feel good to you?
- *Fit for your baby.* Does it seem to suit your baby well?
- *Fit for you.* Does it fit your size and body type? Can you carry the baby without strain?
- *Safety.* Will the baby be secure and well supported?

- *Features.* Does it meet your needs?
- *Usability.* Can you easily get your baby in and out of the carrier? How about putting it on and taking it off? Keep in mind that some models require practice.
- *Construction.* Does the fabric suit your wardrobe, climate and needs (i.e., lightweight for summer, weatherproof for outdoor use)?
- *Care.* Is it machine-washable or easy to wipe clean?
- *Flexibility.* Can you carry your baby in various positions?
- *Adjustability.* Can it be tightened or adjusted to fit you when you are at home in indoor clothing or outside wearing a coat? Can you adjust it easily for use by others?
- *Adaptability.* Will it work for your baby now as well as six months from now?
- *Appearance.* Do you like the style? Will you enjoy wearing it?