Fussy Babies & Children

Babies are born with different temperaments. Some infants are happy and joyful. Others are irritable and cry persistently. Sometimes it may become a chore to care for the unhappy, irritable infant. With an irritable infant, you may wonder if you have done something to harm your baby because of the difficulty caring for them.

Even with a temperamental baby, you must make sure there are not other reasons for the fussiness. Your baby or child's basic needs must be taken care of. All children need love and affection, food, shelter and a feeling of safety. They also need rest and quiet time. If they have been fussy, you need to find out if there is a new problem or are you still dealing with the same one.

CAUSES

- Your baby or child is uncomfortable and fussiness is the only way they can communicate.
- Your child can communicate what is wrong but is too upset to do so, such as crying with a skinned knee.
- Your little one can communicate, but fussiness gets more results.
- Your little one is tired, sick, hungry, in pain, or feeling neglected.
- They have observed other children getting good results with fussing and want to try it out.

If your child fusses when they want something you will only make this problem worse if you give in. Giving in is called positive reinforcement. The more it happens, the worse it gets. Be consistent. This means handle the same situation in the same way every time. Do not give in one time because it is convenient or easy in a public place and then impose punishment another time. Taking away a privilege may work for a child and just distracting an infant or toddler may be helpful.

Just letting your child know that you understand makes them feel better. They know you are not ignoring them. Children also need attention and it is important to set aside time when they can have your undivided attention.

Teach your child self-control. This way they are responsible for themselves. Teach them to breathe slowly when they are upset. Teach them to relax and think about something peaceful or calming like petting a puppy or kitten or something that makes them happy. Praise them when they calm themselves.

DIAGNOSIS

- Is the problem new or old? Problems that go on for months can be colic, food intolerance, reflux, a physical problem or just a fussy baby.
- Happy babies that begin crying and are inconsolable should be seen by your caregiver if you can't figure out what is wrong.
- Are they teething? Do they have a runny nose, cough, or are they tugging at their ears? Are they eating OK? Are there other problems such as nausea or vomiting?
- Usually if your baby is not running a temperature, is eating normally, and is sleeping well and behaving normally other than a little fussiness; it is usually safe to watch them at home.
- If the fussiness continues or something begins that you are concerned about, see your caregiver.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOUR BABY OR CHILD:

- Develops an oral temperature above 102º F (38.9º C), which lasts for more than 2 days in toddlers and children.
- Has either a high fever or one below 97° F (36.1° C) in a newborn.
- Develops large, tender lumps in the neck.
- Develops a rash.
- Develops nausea or vomiting.
- Develops a persistent cough or green, yellow-brown, or bloody sputum is coughed up.

- Develops new *symptoms* (problems) such as earache, severe headache, stiff neck, chest pain, or trouble breathing or swallowing.
- Seems to be in pain.

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