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### Parents need patience to deal with crying babies

"I just brought my baby home from the hospital and all she does is cry!"

"My son is six-weeks old and he doesn't ever seem to sleep."

"I don't think my new daughter likes me because she fusses when I try to dress her."

"I feel inadequate as a parent and worry that something is wrong with my baby."

Taking a newborn home and caring for an infant during the first few months of life is anxiety provoking for many parents, even for those who have done it before. Many pediatric professionals feel anxious about their own newborns, as my wife and I did with all three of ours.

Infants don't arrive with "how to operate" manuals like home appliances do. Every child is unique and parents of newborns often have a limited understanding of normal newborn behavior, development and their variations, which can lead to parental anxiety and cause strain on the family.

In extreme cases, increased frustration can cause a loving, dedicated parent to momentarily lash out verbally or physically, as is the case of Shaken Baby Syndrome, potentially causing serious harm to the tiny, vulnerable child the parents love so much.

While parenting will never be stress free, a basic understanding of normal infant behavior and development can improve parental confidence and comfort, making parenting a more rewarding endeavor. Parents should share their insecurities with their pediatrician, who can help determine whether the baby has a significant medical problem or is simply exhibiting normal, though irritating, behaviors.

Some of the most common questions pediatricians receive are about infant crying. Few parents realize or are willing to accept the fact the normal infant may cry up to three hours per day. As many as 12 percent of parents report that their child cries excessively with colic, an extreme variant often defined as infant crying for more than three hours a day, three days a week, for over three weeks. Often, parents believe that changing food sources may calm

excessive crying. But in most cases, crying seems more related to infant temperament than to feeding choices and changing from breast to bottle or from cow milk formula to a soy-based product. Instead, parents are better off trying extra cuddling and bundling, along with a big dose of parental patience.

Parents are frequently confronted with challenges related to sleep. In fact, almost one in three children are reported to have a sleep disorder at one developmental stage or another. Some newborns require as few as 14 hours of sleep per day, while others enjoy up to 20 hours. One group of parents may feel calm and well rested, while those whose infants are awake and active 10 hours a day may be exhausted and frazzled. It is important to make certain there is not a food intolerance, metabolic issue, or hidden infection, but in most cases crying issues resolve over time, especially when parents are knowledgeable, secure, comforting, and patient.

Crying, sleeping, defiant behavior, and energy levels are but a few examples of issues that confront many new parents. It is important for parents to develop an understanding of the "normal," broad differences in children's behaviors and developmental timelines and to discuss any concerns with their pediatrician during regular visits.

Parents who would like to know more about childhood development can visit the American Academy of Pediatrics website at [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

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