

Fussing at the Breast

Some babies can be extremely fussy or even refuse the breast before a feeding. This kind of behaviour is quite common and fussy phases can come and go during the baby's development.

Why is my baby crying at the breast?

Most common reason for fussing is changing rhythms as the baby develops. The baby grows and doesn't feed as often or as long as when he was smaller. Often the parents don't notice these changes immediately, so the baby feels that he is being "force-fed" and may protest noisily.

Another reason may be too fast or too slow let down. Some babies can be very particular about where they eat or in which position they want to be fed. Especially when a baby gets near to six months, they may get so interested in the outside world that they just cannot calm down to eat.

Teething or illness may cause the baby to cry at the breast. Especially a stuffy nose or an earache causes sucking to be uncomfortable or even painful. The baby may associate breastfeeding with pain and continue fussing even after he has healed. Some tensions or pain caused by pregnancy or delivery can linger for some time in the baby's body and make breastfeeding uncomfortable.

Stressful, but it shall pass

Parents often assume that babies fuss because there is no more milk. However, milk does not dry up overnight, decreasing the milk supply is always a long process. It is possible, though, that a stressful situation slows down the let down reflex. It may further unsettle the baby. Relaxing is a good way to increase the let down reflex. Keep in mind that you produce enough milk and the let down will eventually occur. You can also try compressing the breast. Hold



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your breast behind the areola with a wide hold and press gently.

Fussing at the breast can undermine your confidence in breastfeeding and cause stress in everyday life. Luckily, it is

usually a passing phenomenon and does not harm the baby. If you wish to keep on breastfeeding, you should avoid giving the bottle to a fussy baby, since this may cause the baby to favour bottle over breast. 💧

Soothing the fussy baby

Many tricks are based on surprise: the baby forgets to fuss as the unusual situation takes his mind off the reason for fussing. Some tips from mothers:

- **Follow the baby's hunger cues and only feed when the baby is hungry.** Infants feed all the time but as the baby grows, not every sigh or sucking of hands mean that the baby is hungry.
- **Breastfeed a sleeping baby.** Sometimes a fussy baby eats only when sleepy or actually sleeping. Babies can very well combine eating and sleeping. If you can't feed the baby enough during the day, make an effort to breastfeed at night, consider increasing the amount of night feedings.
- **Change the scenery.** Breastfeed in the shower, sauna or outdoors.
- **Calm the situation.** A dark and quiet room can help the baby focus on eating.
- **Trick the baby with movement.** Breastfeed while walking, in a rocking chair, or bouncing on an exercise ball. Try also feeding in a sling or a baby-carrier.

- **Sing or hum.** Singing gives the baby something else to think about and, as a bonus, relaxes the mother. Some babies respond to funny noises like burping or buzzing.
- **Relax skin-to-skin.** Hold the nappy-clad baby against your bare chest and don't try to offer the breast. Skin-to-skin contact soothes the baby and gives him the power to make a decision about latching on.
- **Cuddle and touch.** Rub the baby's feet, pat his bottom or caress his back to soothe him.
- **Be silly.** Try to evoke the baby's sense of humour by making funny faces and sounds. It destresses the mother, too.
- **Try different breastfeeding positions.** Semi-reclined position, belly-to-belly may be helpful if fussiness is due to a powerful let down.
- **A surprising or funny position** can also trick the baby to start eating.