

How to Manage Pain in Babies

Your Baby's Right to Pain Management

All patients have a right to receive treatment for pain. Treating pain is an important part of care and recovery. Your baby has the right to appropriate assessment and management of pain.

Do Babies Have Pain?

Infants are not able to talk about their pain, but that doesn't mean that they don't have pain. Their pain can be treated. Your baby's health care provider would like to reduce your baby's pain and make him or her as comfortable as possible.

What Causes a Baby's Pain?

- IV (intravenous) insertion
- blood tests
- achiness from fever
- incisions after surgery
- rashes, cuts, or sores
- tubes pulling at their skin.

What are Signs That Your Baby is in Pain?

Babies do not use words when they hurt. They "talk" through their actions. Health care providers look at the following signs to tell if a baby is in pain:

- faster than normal heartbeat
- faster than normal breathing.

Babies have a variety of responses to pain. Each baby may act a little differently, and he or she might respond in different ways at various times.

Babies use a combination of behaviors to show pain. These may happen if he or she is not feeling well.

- **Crying:** Babies may cry forcefully. Crying is high in tone and may last a long time. Babies who are very sick might not have the energy to cry.
- **Facial expression:** Babies may have a deeply wrinkled brow with eyes squeezed shut. Sometimes their chins will quiver with pain.
- **Muscle tension:** Babies may tense up their muscles, either pulling arms and legs in, or stretching out. They may clench their fists and hold their bodies rigid. Babies who are very sick tend to lose muscle tension and are very floppy.
- **Other:** Babies who are in pain will become restless, irritable, and may not eat or sleep. Some infants will withdraw and seem to sleep more.

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What Can You Do?

You know your baby best. You can help the health care providers make decisions about relieving your baby's pain. To help, you can:

- Be present, or ask others to visit.
- Tell staff if you think your baby's pain is not being relieved.
- Tell staff if you think your baby needs more (or less) medicine.

What Else Can be Done to Reduce Your Baby's Pain?

Pain is both a physical and a mental state. Infants feel pain, but pain may also affect their mental and emotional states.

Because babies can't talk, it is difficult for adults to know exactly what they remember or what they are thinking. Health care providers are committed to reducing your baby's pain and anxiety.

Some things that may help:

- As much as you can, keep your baby's environment calm and comfortable.
- Use music, stories, or songs that might distract your baby from pain.
- Use a soothing voice with your baby.
- Rock your baby.
- Hold your baby so that he or she is contained and moves less.
- Rub or massage his or her body to confuse the nerves that send pain messages to the brain. That way, your baby may not sense as much pain.

Medicines

There are many types of pain medicines that your baby can take. Which type is best for your baby will depend on the type of pain, how long it lasts, and the reasons for your baby's pain.

If your baby takes prescription pain medicine, he or she may have some side effects, which may include itching, nausea or constipation. Prescription pain medicine might also slow your baby's breathing.

If your baby is constipated, he or she may need to drink more breastmilk or formula and may need to take a stool softener.

When Your Baby Goes Home

After your baby goes home, please carefully read and follow your health care provider's instructions about pain medicines.

You may be directed to give these medicines on a schedule, even if the pain seems mild. It is often easier to prevent pain from getting worse than it is to decrease pain once it becomes severe. Give your baby medicine at bedtime to help him or her sleep better.

Some medicines may need to be given at different hours of the night and day. Your health care provider will give you a medicine schedule.

When to Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if:

- the pain medicine is not working
- your baby's pain is getting worse
- your child has signs of an allergic reaction to pain medicines, such as a rash or trouble breathing.