

How to Use Swaddling to Soothe Your Baby

If you have a crying baby, swaddling can comfort her and help stop the tears. Use these tips to understand when and how to swaddle.

Shahrzad Warkentin, Contributor

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You've changed, fed and burped your newborn baby, yet as you lay him, drowsy-eyed, in the crib, he's suddenly wide awake, flailing and crying. The answer? Swaddling.

What Are the Benefits of Using a Swaddle?

The nurses in the hospital don't wrap your baby up like a burrito just for the fun of it. After years of experience caring for newborns, they know that it's one of the best methods to calm a baby. Dr. Carey Chronis (<http://www.amazon.com/Dr-Careys-Baby-Care-First/dp/0991341708/>), a board-certified pediatrician and author of "Dr. Carey's Baby Care," explains that young babies spend most of their time in one of four states: sleeping, calm, alert and crying. "Using a swaddle helps transition them from crying to a calm state," he says.

Distressed babies will calm down because wrapping them in a swaddle recreates the warmth and snugness of the womb environment, according to certified childbirth educator

and registered nurse Fern Drillings (<http://www.ferndrillings.com/>). Swaddling can be used, starting at birth, any time that your baby needs help calming down or is having trouble transitioning to sleep. You can swaddle your baby whenever he sleeps, but make sure he spends time swaddle-free while awake.

How Do You Wrap a Swaddle Safely?

Those first few hours in the hospital can be a blur of exhausted memories, so it may be hard to recall the precise, swift movements the nurse used to bundle your baby. Here are the basic steps:

- **Lay out a large receiving blanket.** Place square blanket down in a diamond position, so a corner points to the top. Fold down this top corner so that the point falls within three to four inches of its opposing corner (and blanket is long enough for the full length of the baby to lie in). This should now form a triangle shape. Place your baby face-up on top of the blanket, with his shoulders just below the folded edge.
- **Tuck one of your baby's arms gently at his side.** Wrap that side of the blanket across his body and tuck it beneath him on the opposite side. Do not cover his other arm.
- **Fold up the bottom corner of the blanket.** Make sure it's loose enough that your baby's legs and feet can still move freely.
- **Grab the last corner of the blanket.** Tuck your baby's loose arm down at his side. Wrap the blanket snugly across your baby's chest and tuck it beneath him.

The key to swaddling safely is making sure you're doing it correctly. "If you can't fit two or three fingers between the blanket and your child, it may be too tight," says Alexis Dubief, author and founder of Troublesome Tots (<http://www.troublesometots.com/>), a baby sleep guide. It's also important that the pressure is in the right place. "If swaddling is done correctly, the pressure is not on the hips, but around the shoulders," Dr. Chronis explains. Swaddling too tightly around the hips can lead to hip dysplasia. To keep your baby safe, make sure he isn't getting overheated while swaddled. Remove a layer underneath if need be.

When laying him down for a sleep, your swaddled baby should always be placed on his back.

When Is It Time to Stop the Swaddle?

As your baby grows, you may begin to worry that you'll have to visit his college dorm every night to swaddle him to sleep. But like many other things, he will outgrow the need before you know it. "A baby can be swaddled as long as the baby likes it," Drillings says, "but when he starts to try to break out, it may be a sign that he's ready to stop."

If you think your baby is outgrowing the need for swaddling, try stopping gradually. "You can test the waters every once in a while," Dubief says. "Try putting your baby down for a nap swaddled with one arm out. If that works, next time try two, and then without the swaddle entirely," she suggests. Most babies will outgrow a swaddle by six months; however, once your baby is able to flip over onto his stomach while swaddled, it's time to stop immediately.

The more you practice, the easier using a swaddle will become. If not, consider buying Velcro or zipper swaddle alternatives, which can make it easier to soothe your baby, especially while fumbling in the dark at 3 a.m.

Want more baby soothing advice? Check out these [4 Tips on How to Calm a Crying Baby](https://www.care.com/a/4-tips-on-how-to-calm-a-crying-baby-20150309133812). (<https://www.care.com/a/4-tips-on-how-to-calm-a-crying-baby-20150309133812>)

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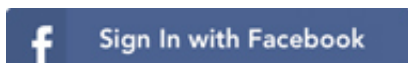
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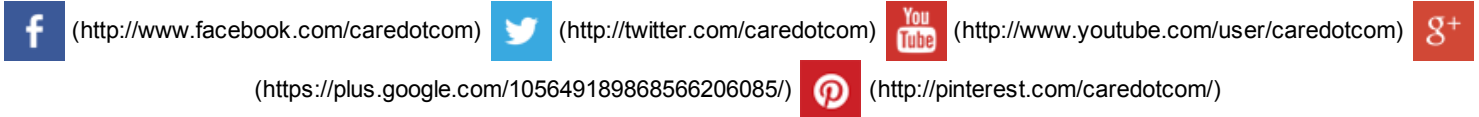


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