

Fussy Times & Cluster Feeding

Baby nursing every hour for a few hours each day? Does your baby have a fussy time for a few hours every day? Does your baby drive you crazy every evening?

You're not alone.

Most babies have a “witching hour” or fussy time each day. For most babies, this is in the evening, but it can be at any time of the day. The good news? This usually only last for the first 6-12 weeks of baby's life.

During this time, baby may be difficult to soothe. He probably wants to nurse really frequently, but when he gets onto the breast, he only sucks a few times, then falls asleep. When you go to move him, he wakes up acting frantically hungry. He refuses to be put down or be held by another caregiver.

You feel trapped on the couch, exhausted and sore. You start to question everything—

Why is he acting like this?! (*because he's a baby*) Is it something I ate?! (*nope*)
Is my milk supply low (*nope*) Am I a terrible mother? (*absolutely not*)

Take a deep breath. Let's have a reality check.

What's going on?!!

You tend to have a slightly lower volume of milk in the evening, but this milk is fattier than morning milk. Babies often cluster nurse, or eat frequently for short periods of time during the evening. Luckily, this period of cluster nursing is often followed by a period of sleep (woo hoo!). We wouldn't want babies to drink tons of milk at nighttime, because they need to learn that nighttime is for nursing and daytime is for eating.

Babies are often overly tired and over-stimulated at the end of the day. This makes them more difficult to soothe.

Here are some techniques to help you through those fussy times:

1. Surrender & Pre-plan.
 - Seeing a pattern in fussy times? Get ready for it. Eat something about an hour before hand and get done whatever must be done.
 - So if Baby says, “Please sit on the couch and nurse me for the next 3 hours,” your nipples don't mind it and there is something good on TV, just do it. Let him cluster on and off the whole time. Because, this is

just a phase that will pass way too quickly. When else will you have permission to sit and soak in your baby for hours?!

2. Take it in small doses.

- Does your baby **HAVE** to be on the breast for 3 hours straight? No, not really. So, if you *don't* want to be a milk slave for that long, or you need to break it up a little, then go ahead. Try 45 minutes on, 15-30 minutes off. Hand baby to your partner or use the soothing techniques below to hold baby off long enough for you to breathe, pee and eat.

3. Soothe

There are lots of different reasons why babies are fussy. But chances are, if this fussy time is in the evening, baby is way over-stimulated. So, play mats, bouncers and lots of direct eye contact and talking won't work for baby.

- **Low lights or change of scenery-** different room, go outside, look out the window.
- **The right noise-** Loud white noise is what calms babies because it takes them "home" to the womb. SHHH loudly in their ear, turn on a loud fan, run the water in the bathtub or download a white noise app. It's gotta be fairly loud to work. Limit excessive loud talking, TV noise or music.
- **The right movement-** Babies don't like to be put down; so sitting isn't an option unless you are bouncing on an exercise ball (this is a great technique). Wrapping a baby in a sling or carrier allows babies to move on all planes of space with you (like when they were in the belly) but it frees your hands to do other things. Get daddy to wear the baby! For some reason, babies settle when lying on their side, so hold baby in your forearm like a football on his side.
 - Katie's favorite carriers are the Moby Wrap for a small infant and the Ergo Carrier for an older infant
- **The right restriction-** Newborn babies do not like to have their arms and legs flailing. They hit themselves in the face and they feel like they are falling. Put baby in a tight swaddle with *hands in* (I know your baby doesn't like it, but trust me). Then, promptly start moving.
- **Sucking!** What settles babies most of all? Sucking. So, if you don't want to nurse baby, strongly consider a pacifier. It is developmentally appropriate for an infant to have a pacifier, so let him have it! (it doesn't mean he will be sucking it when he is 4!). Often newborns need you to hold it in their mouth for them. If they spit it out, it isn't purposeful, so put it back in.
- **Put it all together.** Sometimes you need to keep trying the same techniques in different combinations- suck and swaddle and bounce on ball. Wear baby and use pacifier. Wear baby and go outside.

This is normal and you will get through it. Take deep breaths, tell yourself you are doing the best you can, and ask for help when you need it.