

Fussy Times & Cluster Feeding

It is common for newborn babies to have a fussy time or “witching hour” each day. For most babies, this happens in the evening, but it can happen at any time of the day or night. Usually, babies outgrow this by 6–8 weeks. During the fussy time, your baby may be more difficult to soothe, want to breastfeed more often, and want to be held.

This phenomenon is most likely due to the slightly lower volume of milk that most women have in the evening. Evening milk also tends to be thicker and fattier, so many babies like to “tank up,” and nurse more frequently before sleeping a longer stretch. Babies are often over tired and stimulated at this time of day, and that makes them more easily frustrated and difficult to soothe.

How to Handle Cluster Feeding:

1. Plan for it. If you are noticing a pattern in your baby, plan to spend a few hours doing nothing more than holding your baby and breastfeeding. Find something to watch on TV, pick a comfortable spot, and make sure you have snacks and water close by.
2. Take turns with your partner. If you need a break, try setting a limit of about 45 minutes of breastfeeding, then 15–30 minutes off. Your partner can soothe your baby during your breaks while you eat, use the bathroom, listen to music, shower, etc.

Tips for Soothing Baby During Fussy Times:

As most babies are over stimulated during their fussy times, it can be difficult to soothe them with toys, music, talking, eye contact, or activity. Try using the 5 S’s developed by Dr. Harvey Karp to soothe your baby. Sometimes you can use a few of the S’s to calm your baby, and other times you may need to use all 5 together.

1. **Swaddle:** Newborns feel more secure and comfortable when they are swaddled with their arms and hands in.
2. **Side or Stomach:** Hold your baby on their side or stomach in your arm(s) or over your shoulder.
3. **Shush:** Use a white noise machine or just “shhhhhhhh.”
4. **Swing/Sway:** Newborns like movement because they are used to moving with you while in the womb. Use gentle swinging or swaying motions.
5. **Suck:** Offer baby your finger or a pacifier.