

# First-Year Fears: How to Confront Them



## Leaving the House With Your Newborn

**Fear Factor:** You don't want to expose him to all sorts of germs.

**Why Giving In Can Backfire:** Sneezing kids and groping strangers are legitimate concerns, but cabin fever is an even bigger one. You need fresh air and a change of scenery to boost your spirits. Plus, even very young babies benefit from the stimulation of a different environment.

**Get Over It:** Run errands together, go for strolls, and boldly live your life. But be smart about bugs: Avoid crowds until your child is 3 months old (especially during the winter, when colds and flu are rampant). "For an infant, catching a virus can be a serious matter," explains Tanya Remer Altmann, M.D., author of *Mommy Calls: Dr. Tanya Answers Parents' Top 101 Questions About Babies and Toddlers*. If you're visiting family or friends, make sure everyone washes their hands thoroughly before touching the baby. Let little kids know that they can admire him with their eyes, not their hands.

## Parents

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## Placing Your Infant On Her Tummy

**Fear Factor:** Watching her squirm and cry isn't fun.

**Why Giving In Can Backfire:** Your child spends most of her day on her back, whether she's sleeping or reclining in a car seat or a baby swing. Unless she gets daily tummy time totaling 20 minutes, she won't develop the head, neck, and back muscles she needs to lift her head, roll over, and sit up, says Cathy Ward, M.D., a pediatrician in New York City. Belly time also gives the back of her head a rest and reduces the risk of plagiocephaly (flat-head syndrome).

**Get Over It:** If your infant doesn't like being on her stomach for a long stretch, try shorter, more frequent sessions (such as two minutes, ten times a day). Make tummy time more fun by setting up an infant gym, arranging colorful toys on the floor, or simply smiling, cooing, and playing along with your child. If she keeps fussing, try this baby Pilates move instead: Place her facedown on your outstretched arms or your lap, head away from you. "She'll have to resist gravity to hold her head up, which works her neck and torso," says Dr. Ward.

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## Making Noise During Naptime

**Fear Factor:** Everyone says, "Don't wake a sleeping baby." You're afraid of doing just that.

**Why Giving In Can Backfire:** Tiptoeing around the house impedes your ability to get things done in those precious free moments, like tidying up or phoning a friend. "Ordinary household noise won't wake most babies, who are used to sounds from the womb," says Judith Owens M.D., a Parents advisor and director of the Pediatric Sleep Disorders clinic at Hasbro Children's Hospital, in Providence.

**Get Over It:** While it's certainly not advisable to blast your stereo, break out of your Cone of Silence. If your child is particularly noise-sensitive or tends to awaken prematurely, try turning on a fan (which may also significantly reduce his SIDS risk by increasing air circulation, according to a 2008 study published in *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*). And if you live in a bustling city environment, a white-noise machine can effectively mute street sounds.

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## Putting Your Infant Down When She's Crying

**Fear Factor:** The last thing you want is to leave her emotionally scarred from your "abandonment."

**Why Giving In Can Backfire:** Endlessly rocking, patting, and jiggling your still-wailing baby can crank up your anxiety, frustration, and exhaustion levels -- three things a new mother definitely doesn't need any more of. What's even worse: A child who spends almost all of her time in Mommy's arms may become even fussier when you put her down. Hello, vicious circle.

**Get Over It:** Accept that crying is part of being a healthy baby, not something you always need to stop. "Often, it's your child's way of blowing off steam," says Tanya Remer Altmann, M.D., author of *Mommy Calls: Dr. Tanya Answers Parents' Top 101 Questions About Babies and Toddlers*. While it's fine to soothe your infant for a while, placing her in the crib and leaving the room to take a breather is totally permissible. Just make sure she's not in distress. A baby who cries nonstop could have reflux disease (in which the stomach contents regurgitate back up to the esophagus), lactose intolerance, or colic (crying for more than three hours a day, at least three days a week, for more than three weeks). Talk to your pediatrician if you suspect she may have any of these conditions.

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## Letting Your Spouse Take Over the Baby Care

**Fear Factor:** It's nice to get a little break, but who wants to come home to a messy house and a miserable baby?

**Why Giving In Can Backfire:** You might wind up with a baby who can't be soothed by anyone but you -- not to mention a partner who, after being rebuffed too many times, decides to lie low until the kid is old enough to play ball.

**Get Over It:** Don't be so quick to underestimate your partner's caregiving chops. Is it a big deal if your baby's outfit doesn't match? Not really. Does it matter if he puts the diaper on wrong? You bet, but one poop blowout, and he'll figure it out. Over time, you might even discover something he does better (like getting your child to eat solids by turning the process into a game). "Talk about the tasks you each feel competent doing, and then divvy them up accordingly," says Rahil Briggs, Psy.D., director of Healthy Steps, a behavior and development education program for new parents and pediatricians at The Children's Hospital at Montefiore, in the Bronx, New York.

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## Giving Your Breastfed Baby A Bottle

**Fear Factor:** Once she tries it, she might not want to go back to the real thing.

**Why Giving In Can Backfire:** If you're okay with being on call for every single meal until your child weans, there's little downside to banning the bottle. But if you want others to share in the feeding, are returning to work, or plan to go out to dinner (or anywhere) before her first birthday, you'll be out of luck.

**Get Over It:** Forget the myths you've heard about nipple confusion. "As long as you've nursed successfully for the first four weeks, she'll take a bottle and then come back to your breast without a problem," says Sheri Bayles, a certified lactation consultant in Norwalk, Connecticut. Have someone else give the bottle the first few times, and stay out of sight (and smell range) of your baby. If you're planning to go back to the office in a few weeks, gradually increase the number of daily bottles until she's a bottle-to-breast-and-back pro.

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## Sleep-training

**Fear Factor:** No one wants to listen to her child shriek for hours nonstop.

**Why Giving In Can Backfire:** If a few months of nighttime wakings have left you feeling fuzzy in the brain, picture what a year (or more!) will feel like. While stumbling into the nursery multiple times a night to help your baby settle down feels like the right thing to do, it's not: Sleeping through the night and self-soothing are learned skills -- and it's your job to teach them, says Judith Owens M.D., a Parents advisor and director of the Pediatric Sleep Disorders clinic at Hasbro Children's Hospital, in Providence.

**Get Over It:** By 3 months, your baby is developmentally ready for sleep-training. While you can certainly wait until, say, 7 or 8 months to let her cry it out, keep in mind that the older she gets, the more ingrained her nighttime habits will become. Start by putting your child in her crib, drowsy but still awake. If she screams, check in after five minutes, then ten, and so on (or whatever time interval is comfortable for you). The visits should be brief, boring, and unemotional. "Expect a burst of loud protest on the first night or two," says Dr. Owens, "but it will all be over in about a week, and often in just a few days."

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