

Babies & Crying

THE REAL STORY

One very old tale about why babies cry maintains it's because their reincarnated soul enters their newborn body at the first breath and this trapped entity has no other ability for expression.

At least this yarn from the ages ends happily – the soul soon becomes accustomed to its new life and realises that pleasant “baby noises” make people around it smile, hence the cooing.

But for many new mums, that happy ending seems an impossibility, and it often appears as if we haven't progressed much further with the issue of crying infants and how to deal with them than old stories and people's non-scientific theories.

Brisbane GP and infant health expert Dr Pamela Douglas takes the guesswork out of coping with crying babies, their feeding and sleeping, with her straightforward new work, *The Discontented Little Baby Book*.

A Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of General Practice at the University of Queensland, Dr Douglas addresses some of the most common “theories” with *western nurse* this month.

“Sleep training is completely unnecessary,” Dr Douglas said. “Babies have an inbuilt ability to sleep anywhere and everywhere. The key is to remove all obstacles to a baby achieving sleep.”

But she said that contrary to most advice, this does not mean depriving babies of all stimulation.

“New research shows that it's vital that your baby receives enough stimulation of the right kind during this period to set them up for later life,” she said.

“This runs counter to most expert advice, which recommends minimal stimulation of babies in order to encourage sleep, solid feeding routines, etc.

“Babies cry for two main reasons: hunger for milk, and boredom. The first 16 weeks are a really neurologically sensitive time, thanks to the presence in the brain of key building blocks that disappear at four months.”

Dr Douglas, who is also an Associate Professor (Adjunct) at the Centre for Health Practice Innovation at Griffith University, said parents should understand that a baby's cry is a genuine appeal for help.

“While crying a lot in the first 16 weeks is a normal phenomenon, this should never be confused with the belief that the baby's crying is not a communication of abject misery,” she said. “Crying is a genuine appeal. Parents know this in their bones.

“Delaying your response to your baby's cry through sleep training, or spacing out feeds, etc, neurologically ‘programs’ a baby to experience distress around the sensations of hunger, boredom, fatigue, and so on.

“In short, your attempts to minimise crying actually make the problem worse”

Dr Douglas said her book detailed strategies to help babies cry and fuss less in the first 16 weeks, and she added that many parents' nights were unnecessarily disrupted.

The book also contains real-life stories, and advice on dealing with feelings of anxiety and depression, and additionally answers to questions about issues such as reflux and allergies.

Dr Douglas said mothers were better advised to focus on removing the obstacles that could get in the way of a healthy sleep, such as unidentified feeding problems, instead of trying to stick to rigid patterns.

She is founder of the non-profit Possums for Mothers and Babies organisation.

The Discontented Little Baby Book. All you need to know about feeds, sleep and crying. 🐾



Dr Pamela Douglas has worked in general practice since 1987, with a special interest in women's health. She is founder of Possums for Mothers and Babies, Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of General Practice at the University of Queensland, and Adjunct Associate Professor at the Maternity and Family Unit at Griffith University. Her crying baby research has been supported by various scholarships and fellowships, and she is the author of internationally published medical research in this field.

She lives with her husband in Brisbane, Queensland. They have five adult children and stepchildren, and four grandchildren.



WIN a copy!

The Discontented Little Baby Book is this month's Book Competition prize. See page 34 for details. Go for it!