

Of course babies feel pain

by Dr. Delia Chiamonte, [Baltimore Health Examiner](#)



photo courtesy of [pediatrics.about.com](#)

Tiny babies in the ICU endure many painful procedures, often without pain-relieving therapy, according to a recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The average baby had 10 painful procedures per day, and as many as 75 by the time they left the hospital. The authors suggest that this repeated pain at a time when it is developmentally unexpected can alter the child's future pain processing and behavioral development. They emphasize the importance of treating neonatal pain.

It's about time!

You may find this hard to believe, but I was taught in medical school (in the 1990s, not the 1920s) that babies don't feel pain. This most often came up when we were doing circumcisions and we, squeamish and sensitive medical students that we were, asked our supervisors why we couldn't use pain medicines for those poor screaming babies. "They aren't crying because of pain, they are crying because they don't like being held down," I was told over and over. Yeah, sure. It's true that those precious baby boys started fussing when they were strapped to the immobilization board, but the anguished screams that came out of their tiny mouths when that Gomco clamp grabbed onto their penises was indescribable. How could anyone believe that they weren't feeling pain?

Nowadays, most doctors use topical or regional anesthetics when doing circumcisions, but this is a recent development. When I was pregnant 10 years ago and considering circumcision for my sex-unknown baby, I broached this issue with the pediatrician. I could feel the eye-rolling attitude when I asked about anesthesia, "I suppose we could work that out if we had to," he said.

Of course babies feel pain.

Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Dr. C.

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