



## Infant Sleep

Babies have varied temperaments, and families have varied lifestyles. Developing a "nighttime parenting" style that fits these needs is a challenge for many families. It is helpful to be open to different nighttime approaches, but be careful about using someone else's "method" to get your baby to sleep. Consider any advice with sensitivity to your baby's temperament and your own family situation.

### Facts about infant sleep

- Babies enter sleep through a light sleep cycle lasting about twenty minutes. They have shorter and lighter sleep cycles than adults.
- Although it can vary widely, babies usually awaken two or three times a night from birth to six months, once or twice from six months to one year; and may awaken once a night from one to two years.
- Babies sleep habits are more determined by individual temperaments than parent's abilities to get baby to sleep. It is not your fault baby wakes up.
- The definition of "sleeping through the night" is a five hour stretch.
- You cannot force sleep upon a baby. Creating a secure environment that allows sleep to overtake baby is the best way to create long-term healthy sleep habits. Most babies need help to go to sleep.

### Why babies wake up at night

- Discomfort or Pain: teething, wet or soiled diaper, hunger, stuffy nose, too hot or cold, irritating sleepwear, etc.
- Medical Problems: fever, ear infection, allergies, intestinal discomfort, colds, pinworms, urinary tract infections, etc.
- Developmental Issues: "practicing" a particular developmental skill while in light sleep, such as walking or crawling, separation anxiety, which typically occurs around eight to twelve months, and periods of rapid brain development.
- Emotional Issues: when families experience stressful events, or when usual routines are upset.



## Helping your baby sleep

- Hold and soothe baby frequently during the day. Many babies respond well to being held close in a sling or baby carrier.
- Consider daytime routines and sleep patterns. Do late naps interfere with continuous and deep sleep during the night?
- Have a consistent bedtime, especially for older babies.
- Keep a relaxing, nurturing routine leading up to bedtime, such as a soothing bath or massage, singing, or reading a book. This helps prepare a baby for sleep.
- Active play will keep baby awake.
- Rock your baby. Nurse the baby at the breast or with a bottle.
- Watch for signs that your baby has entered deep sleep such as limp, dangling limbs and a motionless face, before moving him. Then you can be fairly certain your baby will not awake during a move to cradle or bed.
- Newborn babies are comforted and calmed by swaddling (wrapping baby in a blanket with his hands to his face). Older babies usually prefer loose covers.
- Soothing sounds that may help include: bubbling fish tank, recordings of mother's heartbeat, recordings of water falls or ocean sounds, soft background noise like a fan, dishwasher, or vacuum cleaner.

Sources: **The Baby Book** by William Sears and Martha Sears  
**Touchpoints** by T. Berry Brazelton

For more information call your County Health Department.



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