



Help for sleepless babies

New born babies need a lot of sleep but their sleep patterns change and every baby is different. On average a baby will sleep for 16-18 hours a day in the first 4 months and from 12-16 hours in the first year but of course they will get hungry and wake every few hours for a feed or a nappy change. Going without sleep is one of the biggest challenges for a parent and establishing a sleep routine isn't always easy.

What is sleep?

- Sleep is divided into two different states which alternate through the night: Dream Sleep sometimes referred to as REM (rapid eye movement) and Deep Sleep. As we pass from one state to the other, we often wake, roll over and go back to sleep, totally unaware that we have woken at all. This is because we have sleep clues – dark room, comfy bed, etc. A baby needs to 'learn' his sleep clues. If these sleep clues are being breastfed, rocked to sleep or a dummy, he will need these clues again when he wakes at night. You can teach him new clues which will enable him to fall asleep on his own.

How much should baby sleep?

- There are no hard and fast rules. It is unusual for a young baby to sleep through the night straight away. Young babies need regular feeds and attention. Parents are often made to feel that their baby should sleep through the night as early as possible; try not to be pressured in this way.
- If you are concerned about how little your baby is sleeping, particularly if he is crying a great deal, consult your doctor to eliminate possible medical problems.

Establishing a routine

- Between the ages of three and six months, a routine should start to emerge; ideally the baby will sleep more at night than during the day. Do not worry if this is not the case. Note down the feed and sleep times to see if there is a pattern emerging. Try to establish a bedtime routine as soon as possible; perhaps a warm bath followed by a quiet feed and a cuddle.

Checklist for settling babies (0 – 6 months)

- Put baby down on his back awake, allowing him to try and settle down himself. Do not go back at the first whimper. It is worth noting that young babies often need to cry for a short period to get themselves to sleep.
- Young babies will often wake for a night feed; this is natural. However, try to keep feeds as low key as possible, (no loud noises, subdued lighting). This will help baby distinguish between day and night and will hopefully prevent night feeds from becoming a comfortable habit as he gets older.
- If baby has colic, try using Simeticone drops, such as Infacol (which is a supplement that can be added to your baby's bottle of breast milk before feed) which can help release bubbles of trapped air in the baby's digestive system.
- Make sure that baby is comfortable (check nappy), well fed and not thirsty.
- Is baby cold or in a draught?
- Is baby too hot? It is very important not to allow baby to get overheated.
- Some babies like the dark; others prefer a soft night light. Some babies like background noise. There are many apps available offering soother music or white noise.
- The noise from ordinary household appliances can have a hypnotic effect, e.g. washing machines or vacuum cleaners. Sudden noises should be avoided.
- Music can often help babies to settle; try a mobile or musical cot toy.
- Rhythmic movement often calms babies. The motion of a pram or a baby bouncy chair can have a hypnotic effect. Baby slings provide continual movement with the additional comfort of closeness with Mum or Dad.
- Playthings on the cot can prevent boredom and make it a more enjoyable place to be, especially as baby gets to three months and older. Too many soft toys in the cot can act as insulation – avoid overheating baby.

Checking routine for older babies (7 -9 months onwards)

This method, advocated by numerous child psychologists, has worked for many parents who have contacted the Cry-sis Helpline. It can also be used for the older child.

- Ensure that parents and baby are both well. Give yourself 2 clear weeks when you are not going out in the evening or going away.
- Babies and children benefit from a routine, especially at bedtime. Set a bedtime and stick to it. Make sure there is a good 'winding down' period: quiet games, stories and a relaxing bath.
- Put baby to bed awake, tuck him/her in, say 'goodnight' and leave the room. Make sure baby has its usual comfort objects with him/her before you go.
- When baby cries, leave him/her for a set time, (5-10 mins perhaps), then go back, 'check', tuck baby back in and leave. Do not pick baby up. Do this until baby goes to sleep; some parents leave the period of time between checking a little longer each time.

- If your baby gets up, return him/her gently but firmly to bed. Ensure baby knows you mean business and that you are not going to give in. It may help to use the same repetitive phrase and tone of voice every time you go in to 'check' your child.
- Do not give drinks (unless the weather is exceptionally hot), cuddles or stories as this can be interpreted as a 'reward' for not going to sleep.
- Be determined. If you give in now baby will try much harder the next time; as he/she has learnt that you give in eventually.
- If baby wakes in the night, do the same as before. Go back as many times as is necessary to 'check'. In this way, you and baby know that everything is OK.
- Be consistent. If you have the support of a partner, make sure you work together.
- Tell your neighbours what you are going to do if you think the crying may alarm them, and discuss it with the health visitor.

The Gradual Retreat Method

- This is probably easier on the nerves than the checking routine as it may involve less crying, but may take longer. Baby is put down to bed awake again, but this time, instead of leaving, you stay and sit by the cot or bed until baby falls asleep – stroking him/her as necessary. Over the next few nights, gradually sit further away until baby will fall asleep with you outside the bedroom door.

Points to remember:

- Consult your GP or health visitor to eliminate any medical conditions that may account for sleep problems, and discuss the new routine.
- Firmness and Consistency are vital. Baby will know you mean business and needs clear boundaries.
- An over tired baby will often sleep less soundly; always ensure your baby has adequate day-time naps.
- Obtain as much support from others as you can.
- Look after yourself (baby relies on you to stay fit). Eat well and drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated. (Especially important when breast feeding).

You can contact the
CRY-SIS HELPLINE
08451 228669

Lines Open 7 Days a Week 9am – 10pm