

One of the biggest shocks to a new parent is the sleep deprivation that a new baby can bring to the household. Even before the first parenting book was written, tired parents searched for ways to help their baby get to sleep sooner and stay asleep longer. You have probably heard the old adage to let your baby cry or to try bouncers, mobiles, or even stuffed toys that breathe or that play a mechanical heartbeat. The real truth is that babies don't just fall asleep; they must be *parented* to sleep.

There is no magic sleep solution. Babies have different temperaments and family lifestyles vary. You need to explore nighttime parenting styles that help your baby at each different stage of her development. Avoid any method that suggests you to leave your baby to cry alone. A baby can do little to comfort herself other than to cry louder or to withdraw emotionally. Leaving her to cry alone is cruel and it undermines her ability to trust that you will meet her needs. This leaves her more dependent, not less. Your baby is a baby for such a short amount of time, and you will miss these nights sooner than you know.

Comfort Baby to Sleep

Holding and soothing your baby often during the day makes her mellow. A warm bath and a gentle massage relax tired muscles. Lying down with baby on your chest and letting her hear your breathing and heartbeat can lull your baby to sleep. Going to sleep at your breast or in your arms with a bottle is one of baby's favorite sleep inducers. Rocking baby to sleep and singing softly is treasured time spent with your baby. If baby is completely awake and you need her to sleep, a drive around the neighborhood might calm her to sleep by the hum of the car engine and the motion of the car. [If your baby frequently wakes up in the night crying for you, try swaddling them.](#)

Sleep Patterns

Babies enter sleep differently than adults. While you enter deep sleep right away, your baby enters sleep through an initial period of light sleep lasting around *twenty* minutes. If you try to put your baby down before she enters into deep sleep, you will find that she will awaken as soon as you lay her down. If you rush through the light sleep stage you will find that you soon have to repeat the bedtime routine of rocking, cuddling, feeding, or walking her back to sleep. A good indicator of your baby being in deep sleep is when her arms and legs dangle weightlessly. Now you can put her down and slip away without worry of her waking before you're even out of the room. [You can encourage good sleep habits even when your baby is very little.](#)

Birth to Three Months

Newborn babies sleep up to 18 hours a day during the first week and 12 to 16 hours a day by the time they are a month old. During these first few months your baby will not stay asleep for more than *two* or *three* hours at a time. While responding to your baby's needs, you'll be up several times during the night to change, feed, and comfort her. You can plan on being very tired with this schedule. The best, yet most ignored, advice is to *rest* when your baby is resting. Around two weeks of age you can start to help her distinguish between night and day. Interact and play with her during the day. Keep the house light and bright and don't reduce regular daytime noise. At night, keep the lights and noise level low and don't play or talk loudly when she wakes up. She will soon begin to understand that nighttime is for sleeping.

Three to Six Months: Sleeping Through the Night

By around three months of age, your baby will develop a more regular sleep cycle and will not require most of her nighttime feedings. Your baby will be sleeping a total of 12 to 15 hours a day. Most babies are able to sleep through the night sometime between 3 and 6 months of age. "Sleeping through the night" is a funny term, because it really means your baby will be able to sleep for *five* or *six* hours straight. Be prepared during this stage for a baby who was previously sleeping well to suddenly start night waking again due to teething pain or practicing new skills like rolling over. Now is a good time to start nighttime routines with your baby. [By the time your baby is around six months, they should be able to soothe themselves.](#)

Routines

Establish regular bedtime and nap times to help her regulate her sleep patterns. Choose a reasonable bedtime that works with your family's schedule. Your naps can follow a specific timeline or you can put her down every two or three hours. Develop a bedtime ritual — giving her a bath and a baby massage, getting her in her pajamas, and singing and rocking. If any part of your ritual (the bath, for example) stimulates or excites your baby, don't do that right before bed. Babies thrive on consistency, so your routine should be done at the same time and in the same order every night. **During the day, encourage your baby to stay awake for longer periods. Play with them and cuddle them. When nighttime comes, switch to a dimmer, quieter setting.**

Six to Nine Months

Your baby will now be sleeping a total of 11½ to 15 hours a day. Their daytime naps are longer and usually have decreased to two a day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Your baby is probably ready for nighttime weaning, but may still want to nurse or eat for comfort only. *Previously good sleepers may start night-waking because of teething pain, practicing new skills such as sitting up or crawling or even walking, and separation anxiety. Sometimes, a baby learning these new skills will practice at night and get stuck in a sitting or standing position and be unable to lie back down.* If your baby is night waking and is used to going to bed at a certain time each night, now is when you can try making her bedtime half an hour earlier. For some odd reason, this can help your baby sleep longer.

Nine Months to a Year

At 9 months, your baby typically will sleep 11 or more hours a night and nap twice a day for one or two hours at a time. However, don't be surprised if your baby is still waking up once a night well after her second birthday. Baby's sleep is determined more by her personality and temperament than your ability as a parent.

If your baby has their days and nights mixed up, here are a few ideas to get them on track:

- Allow them to nap in more active areas of the house during the day instead of a dark, quiet room.
- Pay attention to noises at night, but not so much during the day.
- Limit nighttime activities.
- Keep nighttime interactions soft and gentle.

Causes of Night Waking

Teething pain, a dirty diaper, irritating pajamas, hunger, a stuffy nose, she's too cold or too hot, and medical causes — colds, ear infections, acid reflux, fever, or allergies — all can cause night waking.

You cannot force sleep on a baby who isn't tired. Creating an environment that allows sleep to overtake your baby is the best way to develop healthy sleep attitudes. The frequent waking stage will not last forever. It passes all too quickly. Meeting your child's needs both during the day and at night these first few years will pay off in many ways in the years to come.

Resources

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