

# Learning Night Time Sleep

## For Parents of Infants 6 months and older

\*When referring to your baby, we alternate the use of 'he' and 'she', but the information applies to both.

If you have concerns like these, you are not alone...

My baby wakes up every 2 hours at night

My baby fights going to sleep at night

My baby is up at 3 am and wants to play

My baby only sleeps if I nurse him to sleep

I can't let my baby "cry it out", is there any other way?

My baby hates his crib, but he is too big for his bassinet

## Keys to Night Time Sleep

1. **Create regular bed time routines that tell your baby's brain it is time to sleep. During the day, focus on routines of napping, eating and activity for a healthy baby.**
2. **Start activities and habits (sleep associations) around bed time and night time that help your baby learn how to sleep on his own.**
  - **Feed your baby early in the bedtime routine so he can learn healthy independent sleep.**
3. **Teach your baby activities that allow her to calm and settle for sleep.**

★ Before starting to teach your baby healthy sleep habits, make sure she is healthy and gaining weight for her age. Your local Community Health Center (CHC) or Health Unit (HU) can help you with this.

**Babies do not need to "cry it out" to learn healthy sleep.**

## Things to Know About Infant Sleep at Night Time

Once a baby is around 6 months of age they can sleep for longer periods at night but that doesn't mean they will! Half of 6 month old babies continue to wake up at night. Every baby is unique.

- It is normal for babies to wake up a little, regularly through the night as they go from light to deep sleep. These sleep cycles are common to all human beings. Adults have learned to go back to sleep. Babies need to learn how to settle themselves back to sleep. This is called learning **independent sleep**.
 

At 5-6 months of age, start getting baby into a short bedtime routine of activities that happen each night to tell her brain that it is *time to sleep*.
- If your baby "fights" going to sleep, she may be trying to tell you that she is overtired or over stimulated.
  - Some babies give clear signs that they are getting sleepy at night time. At times, there is a very short space between early sleep cues and overtired.
  - **To catch baby before she gets overtired, look for early sleepy cues such as rubbing her eyes, yawning, rapid blinking or a glazed look in her eyes.**
  - If your baby is going into her crib by 8 pm at night and falling asleep within a few minutes, you are on the right track.
- You are the most interesting toy that your baby will ever play with. When he wakes up at night and wants to play, you can tell him that day time is for playing and night time is for sleeping. No lights, no music or playing, attend to his needs and then settle him back into his crib for the rest of his night sleep. If you get up and watch TV or computer with him, his brain will learn that this is normal for night time and he will have a harder time learning to sleep on his own.
 

Babies over 6 months of age may continue to wake up frequently at night, even though they can sleep longer, because they have learned that *you* will come and put them back to sleep again.
- Alberta Health Services recommends that babies sleep in their parents' room, in baby's own safe sleep spot for the first 6 months. Around 5-6 months, you can transition your baby to sleep in his own room, in his own crib.
 

The best way for a baby to learn that cribs are for sleeping is to go into her crib drowsy but awake for as many sleeps as you can. Every time is best.

Cleaning gums and teeth with a small soft cloth is an easy way to gently wake up a just-fed baby, so she can go into her crib drowsy but still awake.
- After 6 months of age, many babies will go to sleep on their backs and then roll onto their tummy. It is OK to let them stay that way. Always put your baby to bed for his first sleep of the night on his back. This protects against Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or SIDS.

- Every baby is born with a unique personality. This affects how readily they adapt to change, how sensitive they are to lights and sounds and how they learn new things. To learn more about your baby's temperament go to [www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca](http://www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca).
  - Babies with an intense or spirited personality often have more trouble learning how to sleep independently. They need warmth and structure from their parents and lots of patience! Things that work with other babies may not work with these babies.
- Consider resting while baby sleeps in the day time. This will help you relax and may allow you to fall asleep, catch up on your own sleep and help you make better decisions for baby's sleep. Housework can wait!

Every baby can learn how to sleep if we take into account their unique personality, developmental stage and provide structure and love as they learn healthy sleep habits.

## **Tips for Teaching Baby Healthy Night Time Sleep**

### **1. Create regular bed time routines that tell your baby's brain it is time to sleep!**

- Babies who are active during the day with lots of time playing on the floor and calm, quiet activities at bedtime will settle to sleep better and stay asleep longer. Make sure your baby has lots of time out of his car seat, stroller or carrier.
- Babies should be up from their last nap of the day by 3:30 or 4 p.m. at this age to make sure they will be ready for an early bedtime. A bedtime between 7 and 8 p.m. works well for most babies.
- If your baby has been falling asleep late in the evening, this is a good time to move to an earlier bedtime. Move the bedtime routine 15 to 30 minutes earlier each night to catch him before he becomes overtired..
- Watch baby for early sleep cues around 6:30 at night;
  - Start the bedtime routine as soon as you see these early sleep cues.
  - A bedtime routine might include sleeping clothes on, a story or song, a feeding, teeth cleaned, and into the crib. This should take 15 to 30 minutes.
  - Bed time routines should be positive and calming for both of you.

Light exposure early in the day helps baby sleep at night. It's true!

Baby should be exposed to bright light within an hour of getting up for the day, in order to set his day and night time schedule. This will help him be ready for bed in the early evening.

**Do the same thing each night for at least 2 weeks so your baby can develop new strong brain pathways for sleep.**

e. Your baby will sleep better at night if you teach her that she can go into her crib awake and fall asleep on her own. This will also allow her to get herself back to sleep in the middle of the night when she wakes up.

- At first you may need to stay with him as he settles himself to sleep. Try not to pick him up. Make “shh” noises and pat his tummy or side with your hand over his (this will teach him how to calm and settle himself to sleep).
- Try for a minute or two to settle him in his crib. If he is fully awake, pick him up and settle him like you would have before. Try again next time.

If your baby is asleep when you put her down in her crib and wakes up within an hour, she is likely waking up at the lightest point of her sleep cycle. The goal is to have her fall back asleep on her own after this brief awakening.

f. Put together a plan for how you are going to teach your baby how to sleep. It is very important to be consistent as you help your baby learn new brain pathways for sleep.

**2. Start activities and habits, also called sleep associations, that help your baby learn how to sleep on her own. It is important to feed your baby early in the bedtime routine so she can learn healthy independent sleep.**

- a. Look at how you get baby ready for sleep. Do you always feed or rock your baby to sleep?
- b. A baby who is 6 months of age and older may need you to put things in place that teach her how to get to sleep on her own.

Try not to rock, sway or bounce as you settle baby for sleep. She can't recreate this when she wakes up at night. So she will need you to calm her back to sleep with rocking again.

Try a chair that doesn't move to help you stop rocking.

- c. Put baby down for sleep in a darkened room, this will tell her brain it is time for sleep.
- d. If you have been holding your baby for sleep, start putting her down for sleep. This should be where she will wake up at night.

- e. If baby wakes up in her crib, try other settling activities before you pick her up. Say "shhh" and tell her "it's time for sleep, mommy loves you". Be calm and boring, the goal is to help her get back to sleep without picking her up. You can also pat or rub baby's tummy or side with your hand.

Use white noise at bedtime, a small fan placed away from baby works. This will help settle baby at bedtime and allow his brain to calm for sleep.

- f. Try for a minute or two to settle her in the crib, if that isn't working or she gets very upset, pick her up and settle her.
- g. If you are helping your baby settle to sleep each night with a feeding, she may not be able to get to sleep and stay asleep without this.

Many babies 6-7 months and older who are gaining weight well can sleep longer stretches at night without feeding. When you feed your baby in the night and she doesn't need that feed, it becomes a habit.

To change this:

- As soon as her sucking and swallowing slows down, remove the breast or bottle from her mouth. Give her a quick cuddle and put her in her crib.
- Keep your hand on her and gently rub or pat her tummy or side. Say “shhhh” in a calm, strong voice as you help her settle.
- Have someone else settle baby into her crib and get up with her at night for a few nights.
- If your routine is bath, story, feed, cuddle, into crib, try changing the order of things. Offer the feed earlier in the routine before you start to calm your baby with stories and cuddles.

### 3. Teach your baby activities that allow her to calm and settle for sleep

When babies are younger they need us to calm and sooth them when they are upset or tired. As your baby grows older he can learn how to calm himself. This will create brain pathways that allow him to calm himself at sleep time and throughout his life.

- a. First, watch your baby – does he always hold your shirt when he breastfeeds? Rub his ear? Pull at your hair? These are things babies do to feel good or calm themselves. If he already has a calming motion you can help him do more of that when he is tired or upset.
- b. Some babies find a bath very stimulating; this can make it harder for them to calm down for sleep time. Try bathing him before supper or in the morning instead.
- c. Consider making the one blanket in your baby's bed smell like you. This will help your baby feel calm at sleep time. Every time you pick your baby up to feed him or cuddle him, pick up the blanket and tuck it in with the two of you. Take the same blanket and use it to tuck baby in for sleep.
- d. Allow your baby to try to settle herself by moving, wiggling, talking and maybe even fussing for short periods of time. Babies don't have to cry it out to learn how to sleep but a few minutes of fussing at bedtime may give your baby a chance to settle herself. When she learns that she can go to sleep without you being present, she will be on her way to independent sleep. **She will always need you to help calm her when she is ill, scared or hurt.**

A comfort object or “lovey” can also be used to teach baby how to calm himself at sleep time.

Check that the lovey is safe for your baby and cannot cause choking.

Make the lovey smell like you and then use it every time you cuddle or comfort your baby.

- e. When things change with your babies sleep due to illness or holidays, comfort her as best you can. Once things settle down, go back to the routines you had set up. She may need a reminder that she knows how to sleep on her own. Be patient and keep routines the same. Her brain pathways will help her remember how to sleep.

### Other Suggestions

- Make a plan to help your baby learn new ways to settle to sleep and go back to sleep at night. Tell everyone who helps care for your baby what your plan is.
- Think of yourself as her sleep coach; you will teach her the new "game plan", encourage her as she learns new skills and be there when she needs help.
- Babies need warmth and structure from their parents to build strong brains and learn healthy sleep.
- Some babies learn a new healthy way to sleep quickly. Others need a lot of help, a calm approach and lots of repetition.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help; your Family Doctor, Public Health Nurse or Health Link (dial 811) are all available to help you. Trust your instincts. You know your baby best.

If your baby is having a bad day, can't settle or gets very upset with new sleep routines, calm her like you normally do.

Try again next sleep time with the plan you have set up.

Every baby is unique in how much sleep they need. This chart is a general guide

Age	Total Nap sleep	Number of naps	Total night sleep	Total sleep in 24 hours
<b>6 months</b>	3 to 4 hours	2 or 3	8 to 10 hours	11.5 to 13.5 hours
<b>9 months</b>	2.5 to 3 hours	2	8.5 to 10 hours	11 to 13 hours
<b>12 months</b>	1.5 to 2.5 hours	1 or 2	9.5 to 10.5 hours	11 to 12.5 hours

**Remember your baby does not have to “cry it out” to learn healthy sleep. With your support and loving care your baby can learn healthy sleep habits.**

For additional information on infant sleep and parenting through the Early Years go to: [www.foothillsnetwork.ca](http://www.foothillsnetwork.ca)