

TIPS- Tips on Infant and Parent Sleep

A Learning Guide for Infant Sleep 2 to 6 months of age

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

Things to Know About Sleep and Being a Parent

It is tough to be a new parent and it is tough to do anything without sleep. As a result you might not feel as well, you might not cope as well, and multi-tasking might be more difficult than it was before. Try not to be too hard on yourself.

Many parents find the lack of sleep in the first months to be a very challenging part of being a new parent.

Alberta Health Services recommends that babies less than 6 months of age sleep in the parents' bedroom in a separate, safe sleeping space like a bassinet or crib. This has been shown to reduce the incidence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). At around 6 months of age baby can transition into their own bedroom and crib.

All babies cry to make their needs known. Crying is usually at its worst when babies are about 6 to 12 weeks of age and it slowly gets better.

- Holding your baby skin to skin is a good way to settle him
- www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca has information and strategies for a crying baby.
- Talk to friends, family or your health professional about crying if you are finding it stressful.
- Letting your baby cry for a few minutes won't hurt her. It's more important for you to stay calm than to stop the crying. If you feel stressed or angry; put your baby in a safe place, leave the room and take time to calm yourself.
- **Never shake a baby!**

Every baby has the potential to learn healthy sleep habits with their parents' help. The tips in this handout focus on things that you can do to help your baby with her sleep as she grows in the first 6 months.

1. **Gaining weight:** Once your baby is feeding well and back to birth weight you can let your baby tell you when he needs to feed at night. In the first 3 months, most babies need to be fed 8 or more times in 24 hours. After 3 months of age, your baby will likely need fewer feeds. Some of these will continue to be night time feeds!

- Once your baby is about 6 months of age, he can go longer between feeds at night. Some babies at this age are used to being fed at night but may not actually need it. It is always a good idea to check your baby's weight if this happens. You can weigh your baby at your local Community/Health Center and have a Public Health Nurse record it on your baby's growth chart.
- Ideally, we would like the baby's longest stretches of sleep to occur during the night! During the day, if you notice your baby has been asleep for a long stretch of time, try to gently wake him and see if he is willing to take a feeding. By limiting long stretches of sleep (more than 3-4 hours) during the day you will hopefully encourage longer stretches of sleep at night.
- All babies have growth spurts. It is normal for your baby to feed more during these growth spurts. Once the breast milk supply increases, your baby will return to a more regular feeding pattern. Growth spurts often occurs at around 10 days, 3 weeks, 6 weeks, 3 months, and 4-6 months of age.

2. **Every baby is different.** Your baby's sleep habits are uniquely her own – they will be different from how other babies sleep.

- Over the next few months you will learn to recognize your baby's patterns and signals that tell you she is sleepy.
 - Some babies are born with a personality that makes it more difficult for them to make their needs known and to calm themselves or to be calmed by their parents. These babies may be said to have an "intense or spirited" personality. It is possible for these babies to learn how to sleep but they may need a little extra help, patience and time to learn healthy sleep.
- Every baby is born with a unique personality or temperament.
 - Personalities are not good or bad, this is just who your baby is. How you interact with your baby will determine how she grows and develops.
- If you would like to learn more about your baby's temperament visit www.healthyparentshealthychildren.com
 - Sleep is strongly connected to the development of your baby. As she grows and learns new things, her sleep patterns and signals will change and you will learn alongside her.

Age	How many naps (1/2 to 2 hours each)	Total nap sleep	Total night sleep	Total sleep in 24 hours
Under 2 months	irregular	Varies greatly	Varies greatly	12 to 16 hours
4 months	3 to 4 naps	4 to 6 hours	8 to 9 hours	12 to 14 hours
6 months	2 to 3 naps	3 to 4 hours	8 to 10 hours	11.5 -13.5 hours

- At 6-8 months most babies are capable of sleeping longer stretches at night, but many continue to wake up several times during the night. With your help, your baby can learn how to sleep longer at night.
- In the beginning babies will fall asleep whenever they are tired. As they get older and their brains grow and develop more complex pathways, they need helpful routines, patterns and habits that lead to healthy sleep. They also need to learn how to calm themselves in order to fall asleep on their own.
- Keeping your baby up late or denying her naps during the day will not lead to better or longer sleep at night. This will result in an overtired baby who has difficulty falling asleep.
- When babies are young they often go to sleep late in the evening (and wake regularly at night).
- Between 3 and 5 months most babies will be ready for an earlier bedtime (around 7 to 8 pm). At this age she will begin to have a longer sleep at night, so don't worry that your night will be over at 3 am.

3. **Reading Baby's Cues.** It can be frustrating to figure out what your baby wants. When your baby was younger you learned how to feed him when he showed you early feeding cues. When you think about sleep, you also need to learn about early sleep cues.

- The goal is to get baby to his sleeping place before he is so exhausted that he starts crying. Some babies have a very short time between tired and overtired. Keep watching and you will learn how to read the signals he is giving you.
- Watch your baby for signs that he is soothing and calming himself to sleep. He might be rubbing his fingers along mom's shirt as he feeds, stroking his own face, gently pulling at his hair as he feeds and calms for sleep.

Your baby will always need you to calm him when he is upset, ill or scared.

- When we pat, rub, say "shhh", rock and sway as we hold babies we are helping them to calm themselves. As baby grows and develops he will learn to do more of this on his own.

Early signs that baby is tired:

- Staring off into space
- Turning away or losing interest in what is going on
- Rubbing eyes or bringing hands up to the face
- Blinking repeatedly

Later signs that baby is overtired:

- Arching his back,
- Turning away from you, and crying even more when you try to comfort him
- Hard to settle for naptime or night time sleep even though you think he is tired
- Irritable and easily frustrated

4. **Baby sleep cycles.** Babies have periods of active and quiet sleep. In active sleep (which is like our dreaming sleep), you'll notice that your baby might sigh, suck, snuffle, moan, groan, smile, and have periods of fast breathing – all this activity is normal.

- If it hasn't been long since your baby's last feed or diaper change, see what happens if you wait a minute or two before you attend to your baby's fussing. You may just need to readjust your baby's position to help her get back to sleep. Maybe it will take some comforting with your voice, or a few gentle pats to get her back to sleep – see if you can settle her without picking her up.
- **It's important not to let your baby cry too long– in the first 12 weeks of your baby's life, a minute or two of fussing is enough to see if she will settle on her own. If not, then it's time to pick her up and help her settle. Putting your baby skin to skin is one of the best settling strategies.**

- During sleep babies have very brief (1-5 minute) awakenings or "mini awakes". Adults have these too, but we don't remember them in the morning.
- When your baby has these "mini-awakes" you don't need to rush to her each time you hear her stir, make a noise or cry out. Wait first to see if it is a "mini-awake".
- If your baby is having a "mini-awake" and she is able to settle back to sleep on her own, you are giving her the chance to practice independent sleep.

5. **Sleep Associations** are patterns and habits around sleep. Put your baby down to sleep drowsy but awake. When your baby is sleepy, but still awake, place her where she usually sleeps and give her a chance to feel safe and fall asleep independently. If she starts to cry, pick her up and soothe her.

- Let her fall asleep in her safe sleep place, such as a crib or bassinet for naps and night time sleep.
- Feed her whenever she is hungry.
- **Respond to her needs consistently. You can't spoil a baby by picking her up.**
- If your baby needs help to get to sleep under 3 months of age, don't worry! There is lots of time for her to learn to settle herself as she grows.
- Babies need their parents' help and support as they learn to soothe themselves to sleep.
- Some babies cry when they wake up in their crib if they have been settled to sleep elsewhere. For example, if your baby is held or rocked to sleep and then placed in her crib when she is sound asleep, she may cry out and wake up. This is not because she doesn't like the crib but because she doesn't know where she is.
- When babies are young, they need you to help them with many things. As they grow older they need you to teach them how to sleep on their own. This is called independent sleep. Sometimes we miss this stage and keep "helping" baby to sleep every night.
- **Sleep associations that teach baby how to go to sleep on her own are most helpful starting at 3 months of age.**

- Parents may use many strategies to get their baby to sleep such as jiggling, dancing, going for a drive, a swing, stroller, baby carrier or sling, etc.
- Limit the rocking and swinging at bedtime. Instead, try teaching her that she can sleep without motion. Use white noise, calming words, quiet singing or skin to skin cuddles to help settle her to sleep.
- If your baby is always moving when she falls asleep, she will need that exact type of movement every time she wakes up – even in the middle of the night and for naps.

- **Around 3 months of age, avoid letting your baby fall asleep during feedings. If his brain learns that feeding happens before every sleep, he may wake up during his "mini awakes" and need you to feed him back to sleep.**

6. **Routines.** Around 4-5 months of age, your baby will settle into a predictable routine of nap and night time sleep. This is a perfect time to teach your baby how to sleep independently. Regularly put baby down in her crib drowsy but awake. Start a bedtime routine that tells your baby's brain that it is time for sleep.

- Your bed time routine might include a bath, a feeding, reading a book or singing. Try to do the same things every night in the same place that your baby sleeps. A 20-30 minute routine is usually about right.
- Expose her to daylight in the morning and keep her room dark at night to help adjust her biological clock. Her "internal clock" takes in light from all around her and sends signals that she should be more alert in the daytime and sleepier at night. This helps her adjust to the day/night schedule we all live in.
- Don't worry about being too quiet in the daytime when baby is napping. If you make regular noise in the day, baby will learn to associate those sounds with daytime and quiet with night time.
- Bright lights can disrupt night time sleep for both you and your baby. At night, turn on a night light or use a dimmer switch instead of other bright lights. Keep the supplies (e.g. diapers, baby wipers) you'll need at night near the baby so you don't have to turn any lights on.
- Limit play during the night. When your baby wakes up at night, feed him and change his diaper as needed, talk to him calmly and quietly. Try to be boring; daytime is for playing, night time is for sleep.
- **Give your baby plenty of time to play out of her car seat, stroller or carrier on a clean blanket on the floor. This helps her grow strong and get tired.**
- If you are up in the night feeding baby, try not to watch TV or play on the computer, these lights send signals to **your brain** to "wake up".

- The bedtime routine should be calming and enjoyable for baby and parents. Avoid busy play and screen time (electronics) before bed.
- Keep the feeding early in the routine so that baby can learn that feeding and sleep are separate.

- Avoid exposing your baby to electronics, especially in the evening.
- Videos, computer games, cell phones and television shows (even those designed for infants) send light to the baby's brain which sends a message to "wake up".
- Babies who are exposed to electronic light have more trouble falling asleep and staying asleep.

Discuss these ideas for healthy sleep with your partner and any other people that care for your baby. Your baby needs to get the same message from each of you and you can support one another.

Being consistent with your baby's sleep will make learning healthy sleep easier.

Don't worry. There will be times when your baby doesn't sleep well.

- When your baby is sick, off her routine, or travelling it might affect her ability to sleep independently or for longer stretches.
- When she learns a new skill like crawling, she may not sleep well.
- Help her through these temporary changes, and then start back with the healthy sleep habits you've taught her.
- Baby's sleep changes a lot in the first 6 months. You are both learning. Keep trying and ask for help from people you trust.

Your Family Doctor, Public Health Nurse or Health Link (811) can answer your questions and help you find the right support for you and your baby.

www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca has lots of current information about caring for your baby as they grow and develop.

To learn more about healthy infant sleep and parenting in the Early Years go to: www.foothillsnetwork.ca

Adapted with permission from: Stremler, R. (2008). TIPS (Tips for Infant and Parent Sleep) - A guide to help manage sleep for parents and newborns.

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