

Baby Basics

Sleeping



Every baby's sleep pattern varies. As a rule the older your baby gets the longer she will sleep through the night.

How much sleep does my baby need?

Birth to 3 months:

During the first few weeks your baby may sleep most of the day and night. Other babies may be awake and fretful for quite long periods. Newborns can get tired after being awake for about 1 hour. Your baby may wake 3 or 4 times in the night for feeds and may need feeding every 2 to 3 hours. There is no right or wrong time for feeding. Your baby should feed about 6 to 12 times over 24 hours.

3 to 6 months:

Once your baby reaches 3 months she is likely to be awake for longer periods in the day and to wake less through the night. By 3 or 4 months your baby will start to get tired after 2 hours. At this age she may sleep between 4 to 12 hours in one stretch during the night. Some babies wake 2 or 3 times for a feed while others are happy to sleep straight through the night. Your baby will still need 2 to 3 naps during the day but it's best not to let her sleep for longer than 2 to 3 hours in one stretch or she may not want to sleep at night.

6 to 12 months:

By the age of 12 months many babies are still waking once or twice (or even more) a night but most will learn to fall back to sleep by themselves. Most babies don't need a feed during the night after 7 months but if she is waking try giving a 'sleepy' (rollover) 10pm feed, disturbing her as little as possible. Most babies still need 2 daytime naps.

Note: We have referred to the baby as 'She' throughout this brochure for ease of reading and consistency.

Health information from the Women's and Children's Hospital





Why does my baby cry?

Crying is a normal part of development. It is the main way babies communicate their needs and feelings. Some babies cry more than others but it usually decreases by 3 or 4 months of age. Your baby might be trying to tell you she:

- is hungry
- feels too hot or cold
- feels pain (often tummy or teething pain)
- feels unwell (for instance fever)
- has a wet or dirty nappy
- wants comforting
- wants company and stimulation
- is frightened or lonely when you aren't there.

What can I do to settle my baby into a routine?

Under 6 months:

When you place your baby in her cot for a sleep:

- speak softly to her
- try to relax her by gentle patting/rocking or stroking her head
- play soft music, sing to her or try background noise such as the dishwasher
- darken the room
- leave the room once she is quiet.

If your baby won't settle after a few minutes:

- respond quickly if her cry is very loud or she sounds distressed
- pick her up for a cuddle if she won't resettle
- check her nappy and change if necessary
- hold her up against your shoulder and close to your chest, rocking her gently in your arms
- place her gently back in the cot when she stops crying.

If your baby still doesn't settle after another 10-15 minutes:

- offer her another breastfeed
- take her for a walk or rock her in the pram (don't leave her asleep in the pram – it's not safe)
- give her a warm bath and gentle massage
- allow her to sleep in a baby sling
- as a last resort go for a drive.

Once you have found a sleep routine that seems to suit your baby try to stick to it as much as possible. As a parent you will get to know your baby's likes and dislikes better than anyone. Look for those things that your baby seems to find soothing.

Your baby may become unsettled if you:

- constantly change her routine
- overhandle your baby (resulting in overstimulation)
- yell at your baby or yell in front of her (This will frighten your baby. Babies cry to communicate and are too young to understand discipline)
- ignore your baby's cries.

6 to 12 months:

You may find set sleep times help at this age. If you are concerned that your baby does not have a good sleep routine see a child health nurse or phone the Parent Helpline on 1300 364 100 for advice.

What should I do when I've tried everything and I feel tired and frustrated?

Many mums feel like this from time to time. Talk to a friend or ask for help.

Studies have shown that up to 80% of mothers experience the 'baby blues' and feel down and tearful in the first week after their baby is born. It's a good idea to arrange for your partner, mother or friend to help you out at home for at least the first 2 weeks as you adjust to the many changes a new baby brings. It's important to look after yourself and take time for yourself so that you can enjoy your baby.

Look after yourself by:

- accepting offers of help with housework and cooking from family or friends
- eating healthy foods
- exercising (take your baby for regular walks in the pram)
- giving yourself a treat each week (catch up with a friend, or see a movie)
- getting out of your pyjamas and making time for that shower or bath
- having a nap when your baby sleeps.

Enjoy your baby's 'wakeful' moments:

- the special bond of breastfeeding
- feeling the warmth of her cuddle against you
- talking and singing to your baby
- going to local groups such as new mums' groups at Child and Youth Health or the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

If your feelings of anxiety, sadness and bouts of crying continue for more than 2 weeks at a time, tell your partner or a friend and contact your doctor or child health nurse. People are available to help you. Many mums find the sooner they seek help the sooner their problems are overcome.



Health information from the Women's and Children's Hospital

A note about safe sleeping:

Protect your baby from SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) by putting her to sleep on her back at the bottom end of her cot with her feet touching the very end. Do not keep toys, cords, cot bumpers, doonas or pillows in the cot. Do not smoke in your house or car.

For more information about safe sleeping and cot safety phone SIDS South Australia on 8363 1963 or 1300 308 307.

For more information about sleeping:

- talk to a doctor, community health nurse or midwife
- phone the Child and Youth Health Parent Helpline on 1300 364 100 (24 hours)
- phone Women's and Children's Hospital Health Information Centre on 8161 6875
- check the website www.healthysa.sa.gov.au

For support:

- contact the Women's and Children's Hospital Breastfeeding Unit (for babies up to 8 weeks) Monday-Friday on 8161 7971
- phone Helen Mayo House (support and counselling service) on 8303 1183
- phone the Child and Youth Health Parent Helpline on 1300 364 100 (24 hours)

Remember: No matter how frustrated you feel never shake or handle your baby roughly as you could seriously hurt her or cause brain damage.

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