Safe Sleep

Place babies on their back to sleep. This helps avoid breathing problems and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Watch for signs that your baby is overdressed or too warm: sweating, damp hair, flushed cheeks, heat rash, or rapid breathing.

A safe crib has just three things in it:

1. A firm mattress. The amount of space between mattress edge and crib frame should not be more than the width of two of your fingers.

2. A tight-fitting sheet that covers the mattress. Pillows, blankets, quilts, bumper pads, stuffed toys, and other soft items can suffocate a baby if they get too near his face.

3. A baby placed on his back. Dress your baby in a sleeper rather than using a blanket. If you MUST use a blanket, place your baby so that his feet are at the foot of the crib, and tuck a thin blanket around the crib mattress, covering only as high as your baby’s chest.

Move the crib away from draperies or blinds where your baby could become entangled and strangle.

Be sure your baby’s crib is in a smoke-free place.

Car seats and other sitting devices are not used for routine sleep.

Normal Sleep Patterns

Most babies do not develop a regular sleep pattern until about 6 months of age. It’s normal for a 6-month-old to wake up during the night but go back to sleep after a few minutes.

Your newborn may sleep about 16 to 17 hours a day. But she may only sleep 1 or 2 hours at a time. As she gets older, she may sleep anywhere from 2 to 10 hours at a time.
Going to Sleep at Night
These suggestions may help your baby sleep better at night:

■ Make daytime playtime. Talking and playing with your baby during the day will help make his awake times longer.

■ Learn your baby’s sleep signs. These might be rubbing his eyes, yawning, or fussing.

■ Put your baby to bed when drowsy but still awake. This will help teach him to fall asleep on his own in his own bed.

■ Do the same thing in the same way each night to help him settle down to sleep.
  • Put him to bed at about the same time every night.
  • Spend time cuddling, reading, singing, or talking to him.

If You Have an Active Baby...
As your baby gains more control of her body, she may become so excited about sitting, crawling, and exploring that she may not always want to go to bed. Here are some tips to help a more active baby get to sleep:

■ Help her slow down and relax.
  • Give her a warm sponge bath.
  • Gently massage her back, arms, and legs.
  • Read her a book.

Staying Asleep
It’s common for babies who have been sleeping through the night to sometimes start waking up at night. Reasons your baby may wake at night:

■ He wants to play.

■ He might not feel well.

■ He’s developing a new sleep cycle and behavior.

■ If your baby cries after you’ve put him to bed, check on him, but keep the lights dim. If he is okay, rub or pat his tummy for a minute or two and leave.
  • If he continues to cry, check on him every few minutes until he falls asleep.
  • Slowly increase the time between your checks.
  • Remain calm. Try to be understanding, not angry.

Show your baby that you are there for him while he learns to comfort himself. If you are consistent, he will learn to fall asleep on his own.

Your Sleep
Taking good care of yourself and getting as much sleep as possible are important. The better rested you are, the better care you can give your baby. But if you are a new parent, normally it’s hard to get the sleep you need and want. Expect to have your sleep disrupted for the first several months. It will get better in time.

Things for new parents to try to get more sleep:

■ Sleep when your baby sleeps.

■ Ask for help from trusted family members and friends to care for your baby while you nap.

■ If you have a parenting partner, try creating early night and late night shifts, or alternate whole nights.

Support yourself to get the best sleep possible by doing these things:

■ Keep your bedroom cool and dark.

■ Turn off the TV and other distracting devices.

■ Avoid nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol late in the day or at night.

■ If you can’t fall asleep within a reasonable amount of time, get up and do something else (nothing too exciting, though). When you feel sleepy again, try going back to bed.

Adapted from content published in the Just in Time Parenting (JITP) newsletters at www.extension.org/parenting.