

Newborn Sleep Habits FAQs

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Congratulations! You're now home with your little one and have a few questions. Join the club. Regardless of how much reading you have done, or experts you have talked to, **feeling uncertain** is probably the most certain thing I can guarantee you will feel right now. **You are not alone** in this. It wouldn't matter if you were a paediatrician, nanny or all-round genius; not knowing what to expect from your new baby is 100% normal. Although you have been longing to meet this little person, it will take some time to **get to know each other**.

Your baby is new to the world. It will take him time to settle into it. Light, sensation, noise, smells, feeding... its all new. Your baby has been kept snug in the womb, with all the senses dampened by a warm layer of you. Now here he is all exposed and super-sensitive to his surrounds. If he is a little

sleepy at first, it's understandable. Your baby survived a tough birthing experience and the process may have tuckered him out. If he is a little agitated, it's also understandable. His life support system, located in the base of their brain, is 100% developed, so the drive to breathe, feed and protect himself from danger is well developed in the form of reflexes. Unwrap him and he will startle, touch his cheek and he will turn, place a breast in his mouth and he will suck. You baby has been wonderfully created to live!

Here are some common questions I am often asked. I hope you will not be scanning my response with a right/wrong, success/failure thinking as this is pretty exhausting. Hold them lightly and **use what works**.

1. How do I know when she's tired?

When a newborn baby is well fed, comfy and not overtired, a wave of tiredness can be blissfully accepted, they close their eyes and fall asleep. Ah serenity - but not for long! After two or three weeks, your baby will probably become more alert and tuned-in to surrounds, unable to switch-off so easily. This is when grizzling and crying can increase, especially towards the end of the day.

Signs of tiredness can usually be seen within the hour of waking. You may first notice changes around the eyes; a blank stare, looking away from faces, red eyes, a frown. She may want to suck, but instead of rhythmic feeding, she fusses and pulls away – "it's too much hard work!" She may

startle more easily, tense her fists, rub eyes/ears, yawn and also have tense, jerky body movements. Grizzling may then start and finally when really overwhelmed she can have a persistent open-mouth cry.

By responding to the **early, silent tired signs** you may settle your newborn into sleep before she gets too worked-up and overtired. Towards the end of the day or whenever she is most overtired, she may need more support from you to assist her to fall asleep.

2. How can I help my baby settle to sleep?

There are a few favourites that seem to calm a newborn, as these strategies tend to sooth the reflexes and mimic the cosy womb experience.

Wrap your baby snugly in a light cotton sheet, with arms relaxed, most likely flexed and under chin. No straightjackets! Keep the wrap over the legs loose so he can bend his legs – its good for hip health. It may be handy to use a sleeping bag so you don't have to worry about kicking off bedclothes.

Soothing noises such as “shhh shhh”, a soft lullaby/prayer or white noise (fan, washing machine, radio static) can provide a curious distraction from crying, and if its easy, some parents will use it as a constant background noise over the first few weeks.

Movement – rocking/patting in a rhythmic way is a very calming experience for a distressed baby. Remembering that when he starts to calm, you can slow your pace down too. Prolonged holding, swinging and bending over cots can feel like backbreaking work just after having a baby, so I would encourage you to take breaks and find ways that are gentle on your body too. A rocking chair may be good for both. Or try placing your swaddled baby in his cot and sit beside in an upright chair with an arm through the bars of the cot, patting the nappy region or mattress in time to your heartbeat.

Sucking is a survival reflex all newborns have, which seems to increase when tired. Even in pregnancy scans reveal that babies like to suck despite being well nourished. At first breastfed newborns may need to feed every 2-3 hours, so there may be times he

breastfeeds off to sleep. More sucking stimulates your supply of milk, so frequent sucking, if comfy for you, is a good way to sooth your newborn and establish your milk supply. If your baby is well fed but still wants to suck - a clean finger or dummy can sooth as well as cause them to swallow, which may help the baby that pukes a lot.

In these first few weeks with a newborn, it's important to go gently with one another and not worry about setting-up 'bad habits' for the future. A habit is neither good nor bad – it's something that may just pass as your baby develops, or something you address when you have the energy.

Cot – Most newborns can settle to sleep in the arms of a loved one even if there is a party happening around them. There is no such thing as spoiling your child through too much skin-to-skin contact. Enjoy! However, don't underestimate the value of settling a contented baby in their cot too. When your baby is calm, place him in the cot eyes open and wander out the room. Some babies prefer less stimulation and settle quicker and sleep longer in the peace and quiet of a dark room.

Four ways to reduce the risk of SIDS are

1. Put your baby on their back to sleep, from birth.
2. Sleep baby with face uncovered.
3. Keep your baby smoke free, before birth and after.
4. Breastfeed baby if you can.

More safe sleep tips can be found at www.sidsandkidswa.org

3. My baby is a restless sleeper - is something wrong?

Not at all! Most newborn babies give an occasional grunt or squeak, and can squirm through much of their sleep time. This is perfectly natural. Sleep comes in waves, starting with a few minutes of motionless deep sleep. Within minutes her breathing,

eyes and body becomes more active as she moves into light sleep, which might last for 15 minutes or so before moving into deep sleep again. This cycle of deep and light sleep is natural, the only difference being that for adults our sleep cycles are

much longer and we spend the majority of our sleep in the deep sleep phase. This makes perfect sense, as our brain needs to take a rest. In contrast, your infant's brain is still under development, so light sleep is

learning sleep; where information is being processed and the brain is being hard-wired with nerve pathways essential for life. No flashcards needed – just sleep. How smart is that!

4. How can I help my baby sleep at night?

It may take several weeks before you notice any significant change in your baby's day and night behaviour. He isn't born with a body clock (circadian rhythm) - it's something he will learn. Some ways to support his learning may include:

- Provide **less stimulation at night** such as feeding in a darkened room, and replacing him into his cot soon after feeding. Even if his eyes are open, returning him to the cot gives him maximum chance to resettle in a familiar sleep environment.
- Consider changing his nappy before the night feed, or between breasts so when feeding is finished he is free to immediately fall off to sleep.

- During the day, open the curtains and allow **natural sunlight** to brighten the rooms.
- **Play** with him after daytime feeds by talking, bathing, tummy time or outdoor activities.

After the first few weeks of frequent feeding and wakeful periods, your baby may start sleeping a little longer at night. After a night feed, he may resettle for another long stretch or two. A baby resettling quickly at night is starting to distinguish the difference between day and night.

How much sleep does a newborn need?

Every baby is unique and has her own sleep requirements that best suit her. Within an hour of waking, most newborns feed, pee/poo, have a bit of a move about, look around at loved ones and then they start to show tired signs and are ready to settle to sleep again. Most newborns seem to achieve approximately 14 hours in a 24-hour period, consisting of 5-6 sleep sessions. No two days are the same. There may be days where your baby is hungrier, more irritable or sleepier. It's early days and

the main aim is to meet her need for food, sleep and connection, whilst giving yourself every other spare moment to rest and restore. Pregnancy, labour, breastfeeding and all the many life changes going on right now are huge. Wonderful but exhausting! Go gently with one another. **There is nothing more important than connecting and caring for one another now**; it's the foundation of your family being established right here, right now. Everything else can wait. Including the dishes.

These FAQs dealt with some of the common questions I hear. Maybe you have more.

For more information and support, check out the FamilyWorks services options on our website. www.familyworks.com.au

And of course if your child seems unwell, don't hesitate to seek medical advice.