

Sleep Cues!

Sleeplessness is part of having a baby, babies spend their first few months with little concept of night and day. Newborn babies will probably get over tired if they have been awake for more than 1 to 1 and a half hours. Young babies are not capable of learning a routine so it is important to respond to their cues.

0-3 month old babies have subtle sleep cues. They are probably tired if they:

- Whine and cry at the slightest provocation
- Stare blankly into space
- Turn their face away from moving objects and people, often to bury their face in their carer's chest
- Yawn and stretch frequently
- Rub their eyes or pull their ears
- Lose interest in people and toys
- Go quiet and still
- Some babies arch their back
- They may have jerky body movements

At 3 to 6 months your baby will probably get over tired after 1 and a half hours to 3 hours awake.

At 6 to 12 months your baby will probably get over tired after 2 to 3 hours awake.

Signs of overtiredness in **3-12 month** olds are:

- Clumsiness
- Clinginess
- Grizzling
- Crying
- Demanding for constant attention
- Boredom with toys
- Feeding can be fussy



At 12 to 18 months, your baby will be overtired if they miss out on their morning or afternoon sleep.

How much sleep does your baby need?

Just as with adults, babies and children's sleep patterns vary. From birth, some babies need more or less sleep than others. The information below shows the average amount of sleep babies and children need during a 24-hour period, including daytime naps.

New-born sleep requirements

Most new-born babies are asleep more than they are awake. Their total daily sleep varies, but can be from 8 hours up to 16 or 18 hours. Babies will wake during the night because they need to be fed. Being too hot or too cold can also disturb their sleep.

Sleep requirements at 3 to 6 months old

As your baby grows, they will need fewer night feeds and will be able to sleep for longer. Some babies will sleep for 8 hours or longer at night, but not all. By 4 months, they may be spending around twice as long sleeping at night than they do during the day.

How much sleep does your baby need?

Sleep requirements at 6 to 12 months

For babies aged 6 months to a year, night feeds may no longer be necessary and some babies will sleep up to 12 hours at night. Teething discomfort or hunger may wake some babies during the night.

Sleep requirements from 12 months

Babies will sleep for around 12 to 15 hours in total after their first birthday.

Sleep requirements for two year olds

Most 2 year olds will sleep for 11-12 hours at night, with one or two naps in the daytime.

Sleep requirements for three to four year olds

Most children aged 3 or 4 will need about 12 hours sleep, but this can range from 8 hours up to 14.. Some young children will still need a nap during the day.

Sleep Cycles and the Stages of Sleep

The stages of sleep:

Non-REM sleep

Stage 1: A very light sleep where your child will be easily woken

Stage 2: Still quite light but the body is preparing for the deep sleep. Your child will be more relaxed now—this is a good time to exit the room if you are trying to sneak out!

Stage 3: This is a very deep sleep. Your child will be difficult to wake in this stage.

REM sleep

REM sleep is when dreams occur, it is vital for mental and emotional development. Our brains become very active during REM sleep yet our bodies are relaxed.

- For a child under 3 months each sleep cycle will last about 60 minutes so they will stir every 60 minutes
- For a child over 3 months each sleep cycle lasts about 90 minutes.

Our Body Clock

Circadian Rhythm

The Circadian rhythm is our internal body clock. Our body clock takes its cues from light and dark. Its important that we strengthen children's body clocks so they develop a regular sleep and wake up time.

Ways to do this include:

Putting your child to bed at the same time each night

Wake your child the same time each morning (even at weekends)



Sometimes body clocks can go off track for example when the clocks change from winter to summer time. You can reset bedtime by bringing it forwards by 15 minutes every three nights until you reach the desired time.

Melatonin

Melatonin is a hormone that occurs naturally in our bodies when it gets dark. Melatonin production is interfered with by screen activities—for example watching TV or using a computer. The light from the screens stops melatonin being produce effectively so it is best to avoid screen time in the lead up to bedtime. A recent study showed that babies have a high enough level of Melatonin to go to sleep around their 60th day of life.

Sleep Routines

A good sleep routine can help promote the Circadian rhythm and Melatonin production. Everybody can benefit from a good sleep routine and a good routine needs to be planned well in advance. First you need to decide what time bedtime is and then work back-wards planning the hour leading up to it in some detail. If your child isn't settling until late you will need to gradually move their bed-time forward 15 minutes every 3 days moving the routine too. It is helpful if both parents/carers carry out the bedtime routine to prevent dependency on one person.

Tips for a good bedtime Routine:

- Turn off all screens an hour before bedtime
- Dim lights, close curtains if needed to create some darkness to help promote Melatonin production
- Offer quiet activities, for example fine motor activities such as colouring, jigsaws, threading, building with bricks etc.
- Consider introducing supper time, slow releasing carbohydrates are great for keeping little tummies full. Dairy products are very calming at night time. Avoid anything with sugar or containing caffeine
- Baths are great if your child finds them relaxing. 30 minutes before bedtime is ideal as it aids relaxation by increasing their body temperature, it's the slow decrease in body temperature after the bath that makes us feel more relaxed and sleepy.
- Get ready for bed in the same order for example—pyjamas on, tooth brushing, toilet.
- Once in bed spend some time reading a bed time story to your child
- Give hugs and kisses and tell your child 'it's night time, go to sleep'
- Wake them up at the same time each morning to strengthen their body clock.

Basic Sleep Routine

An hour before bedtime

Turn off screens, dim lights and close curtains. Consider a supper.



Half hour before bed

Bath child



Get ready for bed in the same order for example—pyjamas on, drink, tooth brushing, story.



Put your baby in their cot while still awake. Give hugs and kisses and tell your child 'it's night time, go to sleep'. Turn off light and leave room.



If they cry go in a comfort try not to pick them up if you can help it. Leave room when they are calm.

Repeat until they are asleep

Common sleep problems

Self-Settling

The biggest difficulty is that often children can't settle themselves to sleep at the start of the night. Some need to be rocked or held, or need a parent in bed with them. Once they come up through the sleep cycle to a point of partial awakening and find conditions have changed they need attention. Teaching children to soothe themselves to sleep can be done gently and gradually. Babies need to gradually learn how to manage this separation and will take their cues from the environment, especially those around them. The baby will tune into any messages about whether it is safe and okay to be separate and by oneself.

Changes in Routine

When routines are changed it can have an impact on sleep. Try and stick to the routine as much as possible to help ensure your child feels secure.

Feeling Hungry or Thirsty

Adding in a supper time can help and if a child is thirsty offer them water. Diet is important but it is best to avoid anything sugar loaded in the evenings like biscuits and cakes. Caffeine is a stimulant so coffee, tea, cola and even hot chocolate are best avoided in the run up to bedtime. Good choices are anything calcium based such as yogurts or a glass of milk. Porridge is a great supper snack or even a banana smoothie.

Method to Help Sleep:

The Disappearing Chair Routine

This can be used for the child who tries to keep you with them at bedtime, or who wakes during the night.

- Put your child to bed with their usual routine.
- Sit in a chair beside the bed reading a book (pretend if necessary). If your child is very upset you may need to sit on the bed.
- Don't speak or look at your child.
- If your child tries to get out of bed or sits up gently return him or her to the lying down position.
- Every night the distance between you and your child should be increased. When the chair is outside the bedroom door you have completed the programme.

This process can take as long as you and your child need - several days to several months. Be prepared for the problem to get worse for a night or two. In some cases this just means that your child is testing you to see if you are really serious.

Making a new sleep routine is best started on a Friday night so that you are not under pressure and can outlast your child's attempts to sabotage the new routine.

Night Terrors and Nightmares

Night Terrors

Usually happen shortly after going to sleep

Your child will appear to be terrified but is actually still sleep and won't take comfort from you

What to do:

- Wait for the terror to pass and settle back to sleep
- When these are regular try rousing your child 10 minutes before they usually happen for 2 weeks to break the cycle
- Children normally grow out of night terrors, if you are concerned consult your GP

Nightmares

Nightmares are bad dreams that children wake from and your child will take comfort from you

What to do:

- Reassure them it was a dream
- Don't reinforce the nightmare—there is no need to check for monsters they do not exist remember!

Children with extra needs

In addition to information already provided consider what additional triggers for sleep issues there may be:

- Bedding should suit your child's sensory needs
- White noise may help sound sensitive children to sleep better
- Blackout blinds can give a room consistent conditions
- The concept of time can be confusing for some children especially those with Autism. It is even more important to make sure that the children go to bed and get up at the same time each day. Always try to change their clothes, nightwear for bed and daytime clothes for day even if there is nothing planned to do and a 'PJ day' would be easier.
- If your child uses a visual time table at nursery/school you could incorporate this at home but check what kind of symbols are used and use the same so as not to cause confusion
- If you can identify the triggers for anxiety try writing a social story e.g. if they are afraid of the dark try writing a story to reassure your child they are safe
- Create a calm area they can go—a pop up tent is ideal
- If your child has an occupational therapist discuss whether weighted items could calm them in the run up to bedtime. E.g. weighted blankets
- Hand-eye coordination activities can aid relaxation
- Specialist Alarm clocks can be brought to show children what time it is through the use of pictures or visual cues. E.g. Gro clocks. Use fairy lights on a timer switch as an alternative.

Useful Websites

- NHS Choices: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/getting-baby-to-sleep.aspx>
- Cry-sis: <http://www.cry-sis.org.uk/>
- The Sleep Council: <http://www.sleepcouncil.org.uk/>
- Millpond Sleep Clinic: <http://millpondsleepclinic.com/>
- The Lullaby Trust: <https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/>

If you feel you need further advice or support with any issues that arise around sleep please contact your Health Visiting Team