



INFANT SLEEP



Sleep plays a big role in how we think, feel and act. In the first three years of life, children sleep a lot to support their developing brain and growing body during this stage of development. Good sleep is essential to their healthy development and well-being.

NEWBORNS:

- In the first few months of life, newborns sleep, wake up, eat, poop, look cute and start the cycle over again. They typically do not do this on a convenient schedule. Try to establish day and night schedules by keeping daytime activities more stimulating and nighttime activities calm and quiet. Prioritize self-care for yourself so you can provide the best possible care for your new baby. Don't forget to ask for help from those who can offer you practical support and/or emotional support.
- **Understand newborn sleep cycles:** Newborns sleep in short cycles and often wake up frequently. Respond to them when they're hungry, even at night. Babies cry to communicate their needs and meeting those needs and soothing them helps manage their feelings and stress. Remember, you can't spoil a newborn.
- **Provide physical comfort:** Support your baby's need for physical contact by rocking, bouncing, massaging or holding them close. Slings and carriers can help regulate their stress and create feelings of safety. Use a quiet voice and dim lighting during nighttime waking, and let your baby guide you to what they prefer to help them fall asleep.
- **Keep them close:** If possible, keep your baby in your room for the first 6 months in a crib, bassinet, or cot near your bed. Ensure they sleep safely by placing them to sleep on their back on a firm mattress without loose bedding or toys. Keep their head and face uncovered and dress them in light clothes to prevent overheating. Provide a smoke-free environment.
- **Follow their cues:** Overly tired children and adults often struggle to sleep at night. Some babies can fall asleep when put to bed drowsy, while others may need chest feeding or additional physical comfort. This variation is normal, so take your cues from your child.
- **Be patient:** In the first three months, babies cry frequently as their primary means of communication. If you find it challenging to comfort your baby, it's okay to place them in a safe crib or bassinet, take a short break, and try again. During this period of adjusting to a new baby, it's helpful to have gentle expectations and be patient with your baby and yourself.

3-12 MONTHS

- **Individual sleep patterns:** A one-size-fits-all approach is rarely helpful for children with respect to sleep. Every child is different, and their sleep patterns vary. Generally, infants and toddlers need more sleep (than adults and older children) spread over a 24-hour period, including naps.
- **Night waking:** It is normal for babies to wake up during the night and this usually decreases with age as their brain develops.
- **Deep sleep:** Growing infants (6 to 18 weeks old) may fall into deep sleep more quickly than when they were newborns. You may notice a more regular sleep cycle emerging.
- **Longer sleep shifts:** Some babies may start sleeping for longer stretches at night after the fourth or fifth month, but it is still normal for babies to wake up and need your nurturing care to fall back asleep.
- **Establishing routines:** Follow your baby's cues to determine what their brain and body needs. Pay attention to signs of tiredness. Many babies take 2-3 naps a day with a duration that varies from 20 minutes to 3 hours depending on the individual child. Establishing regular feed, play, sleep routines at this stage helps the brain distinguish between alert time and sleepy times.
- **Bedtime routine:** Create a relaxing bedtime routine for you and your baby. Respond to their cues of tiredness, comfort them, and help them settle into sleep as needed. Active soothing strategies can be helpful until they learn to fall asleep independently, which takes time.
- **Safe sleep practices:** When it comes to ensuring safe sleep, whether you're using a crib or co-sleeping, it's essential to maintain a clear space around your baby. If you are bedsharing, place your baby on one side of the bed, away from the edge and next to one parent. Avoid placing your baby between parents, other children or pets. Choose a firm mattress and keep bedding like pillows, duvets, and blankets away from the baby. Ensure the sleep environment is free from smoke and that adults are not under the influence of alcohol, recreational or prescription drugs that cause sedation. Take precautions to prevent falls or entrapment between the mattress and the wall.

Things that upset your child's body clock for sleep and cause sleep disruptions are:

- Irregular sleep due to lack of routine, variable routine, vacations, holidays, time changes
- Stress or family changes
- Growth spurts, stages of early brain development, developmental milestones, learning a new skill
- Irregular play and feeding schedules
- Bright lights, screens such as TVs, computers, phones
- Illness, teething, sensory sensitivities
- Lack of exercise or exercise too close to bedtime
- Stimulants-sugar/caffeine/exciting activities before bedtime.

