

Common sleep problems in infancy

One of the first questions a new parent asks is, “When will my child sleep through the night?” You may worry that your baby has days and nights mixed up. Your baby sleeps and sleeps all day but is charged up at night.

You might also question how much sleep your baby needs, how many naps are normal, and how long those naps should be.

As a parent, you can guide your child’s sleep patterns. It will take some time and you will need to watch for your child’s cues to know when to try changing patterns. Be patient. If your baby is restless at night, that can make you more irritable as you struggle to get enough sleep. Your child will develop sleep routines.

Safe sleeping for infants

Avoid putting stuffed animals, bumper pads, and fluffy bedding in your newborns bassinet or crib. These may block an infant’s airway, especially when their neck muscles are too weak to turn away from the padding.

It is safest for newborns to sleep on their backs on firm sleep surfaces.

Newborns

Newborns drift in and out of sleep easily. Your child may be wiggling one moment and fast asleep the next. You can establish routines early on that will help your child sleep.

Have a set place where your child sleeps, such as a crib or bassinet. When set down in the same place, your child will recognize that it is time to sleep.

Allow normal household noises to continue during naps so that your baby learns to sleep through those sounds.

If she has a hard time falling asleep, your child may be hungry, have a dirty diaper, or be cold. Newborns less than one month old often fall asleep when swaddled in a blanket. But this changes around four weeks because she will enjoy having arms and legs free.

Regular daytime feedings (every three to four hours) will help him get enough calories during the day and sleep through the night. Keep nighttime feedings brief, in quiet and darkened rooms.

If your baby is cold, be careful about adding too many blankets. Little babies can get trapped in the blankets and suffocate. Always use light bedding and dress your child in warmer sleepers.

3 to 4 months

At this age, your baby will normally nap in the morning and afternoon. Naps can range anywhere from 20 minutes to two hours, depending on your child's temperament.

He may begin sleeping through the night. You can encourage this by:

- Soothing his cries with a pacifier at night rather than taking him out of the crib or bassinet.
- Stroking your child gently but leave him in the crib.
- Checking to make sure he is warm enough.

9 months

Bedtime difficulties sometimes develop at this age. That is because children are able to stay awake on purpose. Your child may also have separation anxiety when you leave the room.

Allow some of the household light to filter into your child's room.

Encourage her to use comforting habits, such as sucking a thumb or pacifier.

Gently reassure your child that you are near by periodically stroking her.

1 year

Regular bedtime habits are usually established by this age. It is normal for children to have irregularities in their sleep patterns during preschool years. These are often related to something going on in the child's life. If the problem isn't serious, it will pass as quickly as it came.

Remember that expected and unexpected events will disrupt your child's routine. Going on vacation or an illness can temporarily change sleep patterns. Be aware of this and try

to stay calm if your child struggles at first when returning to the routine. Your child senses your tension. If you stay calm, that will help your child.

Family Focus is a series of positive parenting tips and information sheets developed by specialists at Children's Hospitals and Clinics, Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN. For a complete list of topics, visit our Web site: www.childrensmn.org, and click on "For Families and Patients" then "Positive Parenting."

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