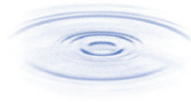




How to Help Your Baby Sleep Through the Night

By Mandy Gurney and Lucy Fitzgerald

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Help Your Baby Sleep Through the Night

One of the biggest challenges most new parents face is how to teach their babies to sleep through the night. In the first few weeks, infants tend to fall asleep whenever they are fed or held and parents can fall into a pattern of continuing to feed or rock their babies to sleep.

This isn't a problem at first. But as sleep cycles start to establish themselves and babies become more aware of the world around them, it can become a problem. If your baby currently needs you to rock, feed, or cuddle her to sleep, no doubt you may find yourself having to do this at least once again in the night.

Babies naturally wake a few times throughout the night. Those who can 'self soothe' are able to put themselves back to sleep without calling for you. If your baby doesn't know how to fall asleep without your help, she'll need you to 'parent her' back to sleep each time she wakes throughout the night.

Studies have shown that babies who don't have enough sleep struggle to relax, learn and grow. After a baby is born, the brain continues to develop and healthy sleep patterns are essential in supporting this. We know how it feels to be sleep deprived. Our concentration and tolerance levels are impaired. We become easily irritated, more anxious and restless. It's no different for our babies.

So how do we encourage healthy sleep habits from an early age? The key is to teach your baby to soothe herself to sleep without your assistance. Here are seven suggestions that will help.

1. Teach your baby the difference between day and night

When your baby is just a few days old it's possible to start teaching him the difference between day and night. Keep the house light and bright. Take your baby out for walks in the fresh air. Even if he's sleeping, he will be stimulated by the light and feel of the air against his skin. Daylight has been proven to aid night sleep for babies and adults.

When your baby is awake (for a very short time in the early weeks) interact with him, talk to him, stroke his skin and place your face near his so he can see you. At this age, there's no need for any stimulation other than being close to his family. Just being held is stimulation for an infant.

Night time should be dark and quiet. Use a night light when feeding your baby and don't engage with him too much. A cuddle and feed and straight back to bed will set him up for healthy sleeping habits in the next few months. Only change his nappy if you really need to and if you do, keep the light dimmed and your voice low.





2. Establish a bedtime routine

Introduce sleep cues through a short bedtime routine so that your baby knows it's time to sleep. In the early days, this won't mean much to your baby. But by three months old, she will understand that you are following the 'pre-sleep' routine and this will really help her to settle easily.

A simple pre-bedtime routine might be a feed, then a short, quiet bath or wash, a sleep suit, sleeping bag, cuddle and bed.

For nap time, a little face wash, nappy change and sleeping bag will let your baby know she's going for a sleep.

You could also have a lullaby, or restful nature sounds CD that plays while you're getting her ready for bed.

Follow the same routine in the same order at each sleep time and your baby will very quickly learn that it's time for sleep.



3. Put your baby to bed awake

Always put your baby down to sleep when he's still awake. Use your bedtime routine to wind your baby down so that he's relaxed and ready to sleep.

If he falls asleep during the milk feed, rouse him gently before you put him down. This way he will know where he has fallen asleep, so when he wakes in the night, he will know where he is and feel safe. From three months you can start to offer the last milk feed before the bath, you may need to give a very small amount after the bath, but this way your baby will learn to fall asleep without the need for sucking.

If your baby learns to put himself to sleep at the beginning of the night, he is likely to do this again when he wakes during the night. At first, you could stay in the room with him while he learns this important skill. Later, you should be able to leave him while he soothes himself to sleep.





4. Introduce night time comforters

Sleep aids that don't require your presence but help to reassure your baby can work wonders in helping her sleep through the night.

While preparing for bed a fussy, or over stimulated baby may be calmed by rhythmical sounds such as gentle waves.

Security objects or baby comforters can help babies learn to self soothe and sleep independently. Before giving the comforter to your baby, keep it close to your skin for a few hours or overnight so that it smells of you. From infancy, you can place the comforter somewhere safe in your baby's basket or cot so that she can smell or see it nearby.

Even just being able to see the comforter at this early age can give your baby the security she needs to fall back to sleep, especially if it smells all yummy like you.

But make sure it's out of reach until you're sure your baby will be able to handle it safely. Some comforters (such as the Sleepytot baby comforter) can be attached to the cot in the early days for peace of mind, and later given to your baby to cuddle when you feel it's safe.

Between 6 and 12 months, your baby will start to form a very strong attachment to the comforter, often needing it to fall asleep. This is a key time in your baby's life as she begins to understand you can go away and leave her and separation anxiety can set in. Baby comforters have been shown to make this time much easier for your baby (and you!).

5. Create the Right Environment

It's a good idea to create a place for your baby to sleep where he can be undisturbed. Naps and night sleep in his cot, in a darkened room will help him to feel secure and safe as he drifts off to sleep.

Also, keep an eye on the temperature of your baby's nursery, 18 degrees C is recommended. A sleeping bag suitable for the time of year will stop him kicking the covers off in the middle of the night and keep him warm and safe.





6. Create a day time routine

This doesn't have to be a rigid schedule. Some days your baby will be hungrier than others, or need a little more or less sleep. But following a general pattern to your day will help you to space out naps so that your baby doesn't become overtired or have too much sleep in the day.

It's important not to let your baby become overtired or she will find it difficult to settle herself to sleep and to eat as well.

7. Make sure your baby isn't hungry

If your baby is genuinely waking up hungry during the night and he's six months or over, you may need to look at fitting in more calories in the day. Wake your baby at the same time each morning; a seven o'clock start will regulate his body clock and enable you to follow a napping and feeding schedule during the day that suits you and your baby.

You could also consider introducing a dream feed. This is a late feed between 10pm and 11:30pm where you simply take your baby out of the cot, feed him, and put him back to bed, without waking him.

The benefit of this is that you are more likely to try methods of helping your baby go back to sleep at night that don't involve feeding, if you know he has a full tummy. A dummy, a cuddle, a pat... these things often resettle a baby who isn't hungry. And don't worry, if your baby is genuinely hungry, he'll let you know!





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Lucy Fitzgerald created the award winning Sleepytot Baby Comforter after her first baby (Laurie) kept waking in the night. Through extensive research and learning she found that baby comforters can play a hugely important role in helping babies and children sleep through the night.

Laurie also had a dummy to sleep with and Lucy wanted to make it easier for him to find at night. So she gave the Sleepytot Baby Comforter Velcro tabs to secure a dummy to. From birth, the Sleepytot can be attached to the cot so baby can smell and see it near. Later, when you feel it's safe, you can place it in the cot with your baby. This will help your baby to feel secure when waking briefly at night.

For little ones who use a dummy to sleep with, the Sleepytot baby comforter makes it easier for babies to find, so they can return to sleep without fully waking (and calling you!) during the night.

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Mandy Gurney is founder of the highly acclaimed Millpond Children's Sleep Clinic, which has a 97% success rate in resolving children's sleep problems. The techniques they use are not new or unique to them but well-recognized core techniques that have been fully researched and used by many professionals around the world.

However, what distinguishes their approach is that they don't adhere to any one particular technique in a given situation, believing that the solution to a sleep problem must take into account the particular family's environment, composition, needs and expectations. So they take a tailor-made approach: one that is sympathetic rather than prescriptive and that always has the child at its centre.

All of the team at Millpond are qualified health professionals with many years experience helping families solve their children's sleep problems.

They have also written a book, "[Teach Your Child to Sleep](#)" published by Hamlyn.

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