



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



What to Know About Baby Sleep

Many people will give you advice about sleep. There are lots of different beliefs about how to get a baby to sleep. Not all of the advice will be helpful. Different opinions can be confusing!

Here's what research and info about child development tell us about sleep. Knowing what to expect can help you make the right sleep choices for your family.

Babies who are over-tired often have a *harder* time falling asleep.

- ✦ Too little sleep makes it harder for babies to fall asleep. The body makes a stress hormone called cortisol. Cortisol works like caffeine. It keeps the body awake. Being overtired makes your baby's body produce more cortisol. That makes it harder for them to fall asleep. Keeping them up all day will make sleep worse overnight. Good sleep helps make more good sleep.
- ✦ **Signs that your baby is overtired are:**
 - Long crying spells
 - Short naps or short night sleep
 - Waking soon after falling asleep
 - Fighting sleep even when very tired

Earlier bedtimes lead to longer periods of sleep.

- ✦ Babies have a body clock that helps them learn to sleep at night and be active during the day. This body clock is developing across the first couple of months of life.
- ✦ Most babies are **ready to sleep early in the evening, between 6–8 pm**. Putting your baby to bed late will confuse their internal clock. This can make it harder to get them to sleep.

All children need adequate sleep.

- ✦ Very tired kids may seem wild or silly. They may even look very awake. A good phrase is: **"Wired is tired."**
- ✦ If your baby seems too awake at bedtime, try putting them to bed earlier. This will help them sleep longer and better. Your baby needs sleep to grow and learn.

Babies often need some help to fall asleep.

- ✦ Very new babies will fall asleep anywhere. But as they grow, most babies will need some help to fall asleep. Try using an earlier bedtime (like 7–7:30 pm), a dark room, and a soothing bedtime ritual — like songs, stories, and cuddling with you.
- ✦ **It's okay to put your baby down to sleep while they are still awake, but drowsy.** They may fuss a bit, but will often fall asleep on their own.



Babies need daytime naps, even if their night-time sleep is good.

- ✦ Think of your baby's sleep like a "sleep tank." Naps help fill the baby's tank. Awake time slowly empties the tank. If the tank gets too low, the baby gets too tired. **Day-time sleep (naps) help babies be ready for good night-time sleep.**

Waking up at night is normal.

- ✦ It can be hard on adults when babies wake up at night. But it's normal for babies. All people wake between sleep cycles. Babies, kids, and adults do this. The key is going *back* to sleep. Your baby will need your help with this during their first few months of life. **It's ok to go to them and soothe them back to sleep.**

Babies are not scared of the dark.

- ✦ Young babies are not afraid of the dark. They are used to the darkness inside their mother's womb. **Dark feels calm and safe.** If you can, a dark room may help babies sleep.

Your baby will let you know when they are done with their bedtime feed.

- ✦ Your baby does not need to be forced to finish their bottle before bed. Babies who sleep all night may eat less some nights. They may wake hungrier in the morning. Even young babies can decide when they are full at each feed.
- ✦ In the early months of life, it's normal to wake for feeding. Getting feeds throughout the day will also help sleep at night.

Avoid introducing solid food as a strategy for better infant sleep.

- ✦ Introducing solids early does not help sleep. Putting cereal in a bottle does not help sleep. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests introducing solids around 6 months. Even then, night waking is normal. As babies get older, longer sleep at night will happen.

Both breast-fed and formula-fed babies have the same sleep patterns.

- ✦ Babies wake for many reasons. Hunger is only one reason. Sleep also depends on your baby's mood, temperament, and their sleep habits. Research does not show that formula makes babies sleep longer.

Have more questions?

Talk to your baby's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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