



5 WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD sleep through the night

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Introduction

Healthy sleep habits are very important for all of us. The same way sleep deprivation and sleep fragmentation is hard on you, *it is hard on your child*. Well rested babies make happy babies and well rested parents make happy parents and happy parents make *better* parents.

This guide will share with you the five primary ways you can help your baby sleep through the night. This guide is not meant to be a cure-all as everyone's situation is unique. What works for you may not work for someone else and what works for many might not work for you! But, I hope this guide will begin to pave the way for you and your family to get more sleep.

It might surprise you how much sleep your baby needs. Babies younger than six months old, on average, need 14 hours of sleep in 24 hours. Babies 6-12 months need 13-14 and over a year old, 12-13. That is a lot of sleep! Adequate sleep helps your baby in many ways and inadequate sleep has been shown to lead to a multitude of problems. Here are just a few reasons to help your child sleep enough:

- ✓ Learning and Memory – Children who get enough sleep seem to learn more rapidly than those who are tired. Have you ever tried to learn something new when you're tired? It's hard! Babies and toddlers learn a vast amount of information in a short amount of time.
- ✓ Safety – Similar to how it is dangerous for you to drive in a severe sleep-deprived state, it can be more problematic for your baby to go up and down stairs, ride his tricycle, etc when he has not slept enough. I always notice my boys are clumsier when they are tired.

- ✓ Mood – This is a big one for a lot of people. While some children won't get too cranky, some get downright monstrous. Behavior problems have been linked to sleep deprivation.

- ✓ Illness – Your body's immune system has more trouble fighting off illnesses when it hasn't gotten enough rest.

- ✓ Obesity – A Harvard study concluded that too little sleep in babies and toddlers might be linked to obesity. Our bodies release hormones leptin and ghrelin to signal to our body we are full and hungry, respectively. When we don't sleep enough, leptin levels go down and when you get a spike of ghrelin, you will get hungry and most likely, eat when you should be sleeping.

- ✓ Depression – Studies are now finding that it was once thought that sleep problems were a *symptom* of depression, but they are now considering that sleep problems may *precede* depression. In other words, if you begin to have substantial sleep problems, The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) strongly recommends that you urgently go see a sleep specialist. Depression is the most common form of mental health problem and it now considered as common in children as it is adults. Each year 17 million people suffer from depression and as many as 1 in 33 children may have depression.

Now, that we know that children need a lot of sleep and why it's important, let's get started on helping your child sleep through the night!

1. Sleep Routines

Do you have a routine for your child? Do you get up and go through the same process throughout the day each and every day? Children thrive on routine and knowing what to expect next. It gives them a sense of security to know their life is not full of chaos. Okay, maybe your life is not chaotic just because you might not have a bedtime or naptime routine. Fair enough. And, no, you do not have to plan each day with the same tasks each and every day. That would be boring! But, when done right, nap and bedtime routines will cue your child that sleep is near and sets his/her expectations. When done right, your child might start to get sleepy and eyes droopy before you even get to step 2.

A typical bedtime routine might include diaper and pajamas, a quiet game, nursing/bottle/sippie (for babies younger than 1 or 2), brushing teeth, potty (if applicable), book (or 2), singing and cuddling, and then lights out. A nap routine is usually very similar to the bedtime routine, but usually shorter (about 10 minutes).

I purposely did not include a bath in my sample routine above for a few reasons:

- Some parents simply don't have the time or desire to give a bath every single night. You might work full time and not get home until pretty close to bedtime.
- Your child may have dry skin and even plain water can dry out his skin more.

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- If your child is spirited, a bath can actually have the opposite effect from relaxing your child and instead, give him a boost of energy.

Whatever your specific routine is, the individual steps are unimportant. It is only your **consistency** that makes your routines successful or not. Sometimes all that's standing in the way of a child sleeping well is a good, consistent routine. But, if it's not enough, read more!

2. Early Bedtime

What about the advice to “Keep her up so she’ll sleep more at night”?

This might be advice that some of your family or friends give you and maybe you have tried it and it hasn’t worked and that’s why you’re reading this. In my experience, the most misunderstood fact when it comes to a baby’s sleep is the idea that you should keep your baby up longer to get more sleep out of her. This does not promote *more* sleep. In fact, many times it creates less!

It is very ***counter-intuitive***, but sometimes the only thing standing in the way of a better night’s sleep is an earlier bedtime. Although it is hard for many parents to accept, I promise this is true.

The problem with a too-late bedtime is a child will get overtired. When we are overtired (adults included), our bodies release hormones to fight fatigue. This makes it hard for us to settle down and relax and sleep well. This is especially true for your baby. An overtired baby will have more trouble falling asleep and, most importantly, *staying* asleep.

The second part of the problem is that babies biologically (it’s in their nature!) tend to be early risers in the early days. The world is an exciting place and the first sign of daylight, they want to explore! Don’t worry. One day he will be a teenager and you will have to drag him out of bed. But, for now, this means that regardless of bedtime, you may not get to sleep in like you did before you had kids.

What does this mean to you? Remember when I said they need a lot of sleep? Most babies one year and younger need 11-12 hours of sleep each night. Toddlers 2-3 years old and younger need 10-11 hours of sleep each night. This

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means that if you put her to bed at 9pm, in hopes of getting her to sleep in, and she still wakes at 7am (or earlier), she has just missed out on at least 1 or 2 hours of sleep if she is, let's say, 9 months old.

In addition, I have helped many parents battle a 5am wake-time. They have been putting him to bed at 9pm and he has only been getting 8 hours of sleep. They are afraid if they put him to bed at 8pm or earlier, at the time he **should** be going to bed, he will rise at 4am or earlier. Like I said, it is counter-intuitive, but he will not wake earlier than 5am. In fact, many times he will sleep **LATER** and most likely sleep 11-12 hours, at night alone.

When he is overtired, many times it reveals itself in waking too early. 4-6 am is lighter sleep (for everyone) anyway and when he is overtired, it will be even harder for him to go back to sleep at this time.

The key to choosing the right bedtime is dependent on the time the last nap ends and to make sure it's not too long until bedtime such that she is too tired. I always recommend a bedtime between 6 & 7 p.m. for babies 6 months and younger, and between 6 & 8 p.m. for babies and toddlers until at least 18 months old. It gets a little murky once they get to be over 18 months old, but I won't get into all those details here.

3. Naps

Naps are an important component of sleeping through the night. It seems strange, but the better the baby naps during the day, the better night sleep can be. The less likely she is overtired come bedtime, the better she can settle down and sleep better all night. She won't be as restless and won't have as many night-wakings. Many people think they should limit naps, so they will be more tired at night. This often backfires. They might crash due to exhaustion, but most likely will either not sleep restfully, waking often, or will wake too early in the morning.

A nap is considered to be restorative if the baby is still (i.e. not moving like in a swing or car or stroller) and the nap is one hour or more. It varies widely what people believe to be a "normal" or "good" nap, so it's important to know what the average nap looks like. Some people think babies should sleep 3 hours each time and others seem to think 30 minutes is enough. I remember one parent who would keep her twins in their cribs for almost a whole afternoon (3-4 hours) because that's how long she thought they should sleep. We need to set our expectations correctly, so we know what to expect from our babies.

It is normal for babies younger than 6 months old to take 3-4 short 30-45 minute catnaps. After 6 months old, naps should begin to lengthen to 2-3 longer naps. The 3rd nap is almost always just 30-45 minutes, just to help them get to bedtime. However, some babies don't have this nap at all and only have 2 longer naps. The average amount of napping is 2-3 hours each day in this age group. The 3rd nap is considered "optional" and for many, it's hard to get, so this is the only nap that is considered okay to be in a stroller or otherwise "on the go".

For babies younger than 9 months old, short naps are almost always due to too much wake-time between naps. When a baby is overtired, he will have trouble

settling down enough to nap well and make it past that first sleep transition around the 30-45 minute mark. You might notice if you're holding your baby during naps, he stirs around this time but being in your arms, he re-settles and sleeps a lot longer. It might frustrate you that when he's not in your arms and in the crib, instead, that he will just wake up. This is a common complaint. If your baby is short-napping you, try to decrease the wake-time between naps. This wake-time should ideally be just 1-2 hours, tops, when baby is under 6 months old and 2-3 hours, for older babies. When she isn't overtired, she is better able to transition to the next sleep phase.

When a baby is over 9 months old, short naps can either be due to too much wake time or too little. Confusing, I know. If a baby is very sensitive to becoming overtired (i.e. gets very cranky, quickly), I suggest decreasing his wake-time between naps. If a baby seems sleepy, but is overall in okay spirits, try increasing wake-time between naps before trying to shorten wake-time. This will take some trial and error to see which works best.

Whatever changes you try to make to your baby's schedule, do it for at least 3-4 days to a week to determine whether it's working or not. You may need to go in the other direction or need to fine-tune your schedule. I'd need to know your specific situation (these are just general guidelines, of course), to give more advice than that.

Average wake-time in this age group is 2-3 hours until he transitions to just one midday nap (this usually happens around 15-18 months old and can be a doozy!).

Also, around 6 months of age (some are ready by 5 months and some won't be ready until 7+ like my first-born), you should nap baby more on a schedule. You

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should always use your baby as a guide, first and foremost, but in general, a schedule works wonders for babies who are having trouble napping (particularly when the problem is short-napping in an older baby). A typical schedule might be 7(wake)-9(nap)-1(nap)-(4)(nap)-7(bed). The third nap is optional and usually a short 30-45 minute catnap that most babies lose by 9 months old (if they had it at all).

We all have internal clocks and if you get your baby used to sleeping at the same time every day, this will make it easier for her to nap. Remember, our bodies release hormones to fight fatigue, so if she is napping at different times every day, her body will be fighting fatigue and make it even harder for her to nap when you want her to.

If none of these things seem to help and your baby is either continuing to fight his nap or takes short naps, you might need to encourage him to nap more. You may want to look at sleep training him.

4. Manage Sleep Associations

Is it a bad idea to rock your baby? Can it be harmful to your baby? It depends. It is never a bad idea to cuddle your baby and give her lots of love and affection! It's only when rocking your baby becomes a task difficult to sustain is it a problem. It becomes harmful to the baby if you need to continually rock your baby all night long, robbing her of adequate sleep.

How do you fall asleep?

What kind of routine do you do before you go to sleep each night? Do you watch TV? Talk to your partner? Do you read a book? Do you sleep on a pillow? These are the types of things you associate with going to sleep each night. What would happen if your power was out and you couldn't watch the news or read your book? Would you have trouble falling asleep? Maybe. Maybe not. Would you have trouble going to sleep without your pillow? That might be more likely to give you trouble. Some sleep associations are stronger than others. What if you went to sleep with your pillow and covers and 2 hours later woke up and they were gone? Would you be able to go back to sleep without looking for the pillow? Now let's look at how this concept might affect your baby.

How does your child fall asleep?

Let's look at how many babies fall asleep. They might fall asleep while their mother or father is rocking them in a rocking chair, bundled up and very cozy in their parent's arms. Or, they may fall asleep nursing or sucking on a bottle of breast milk or formula. Or, maybe they doze off with the simple use of a pacifier.

Minus the teeth issue with formula later on, there isn't a problem with any of these methods of falling asleep until it is a problem.

From the time my son was an itty bitty baby, he loved to be walked, rocked and nursed to sleep. He also loved napping in the moving swing. At first this was not a problem. He would fall asleep quickly and we'd put him down. But, several weeks later, I found myself rocking him for 2-3 hours each night to put him to bed. He'd fall asleep easily, but then when I put him down he'd wake up! Ah! And, then I'd need to repeat it every 1-2 hours when he woke up. It was exhausting! And, I didn't understand why until later on when I learned about sleep associations.

The problem with sleep associations lies in the fact that your baby needs YOU to recreate the environment in which they fell asleep. YOU become their "pillow" and when they wake up through sleep transitions (that we ALL have!) and their pillow is gone, they don't know how to go back to sleep.

So, the key is to allow them to go to sleep the same way they will wake up periodically throughout the night. If they wake up briefly and find you gone or the movement has stopped (as with my son) or their pacifier is gone or...they will wake up more and have to call out to you so you can "help" them once again. "Find my 'pillow', mommy and daddy!!"

I want to reiterate that rocking your baby, using a pacifier, nursing or drinking a bottle before bed, etc. are not bad things to do. If you don't mind rocking your baby for 10 minutes and he falls asleep, you transfer him to his bed (or take him to bed with you) and he sleeps all night, then there is no problem. It's only when you can't keep up with the <insert sleep association> that it becomes a problem.

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Keep in mind that your sleep fragmentation that makes you exhausted is no better for your baby than it is for you. If you are cranky, don't you think she will be too over time? I would have LOVED to rock my son to sleep every night and boy did I try over and over (unintentionally -- just in my nature). We slipped back into bad habits more times than I want to count, but it just became a hitch for him EVERY time. In the end, I was able to continue to nurse him to sleep once he learned the necessary skills to go BACK to sleep throughout the rest of the night, but he did have to learn those first. With opportunity and practice we can all learn a new way to sleep, even without a pillow!

The key is to break the sleep associations causing problems. Sure, some will drop them on their own, eventually, but some won't and there is no way to know what will be a problem for a month or for years until you are there. It is also harder to break habits the longer we have them. Have you ever tried to stop biting your fingernails, smoking, or eating sweets after 9pm? The longer you've done it, the harder it is to break the habit. The same goes for your child. The longer you wait, the harder it might be for him to sleep well.

5. Manage Night Feedings

The answer to the question of when a child can go all night without eating varies widely among the “experts” and pediatricians alike. Some will say once they double their birth weight while others will say 1-2 feedings up until 9 months is normal. Some say they need to eat on demand every 3 to 6 hours until they are on 3 square solid meals per day. Many will say by 6 months they can go all night without eating and others say by 3 or 4 months.

I personally believe that babies vary and so will the answer to this question and thus it is up to *you*, who know your baby best, (and your pediatrician) to determine whether she needs to eat at night. It is important to note that it is not normal for a baby to need to eat every hour or two once they are at least 3 months old (or sooner). If this is happening, it is likely your baby has a sleep association with a bottle or nursing (see above). Studies have shown that it has nothing to do with nutrition or solids, but a developmental milestone, so please don't start solids only to lengthen sleep.

I typically err on the side of caution that a baby needs to eat at night 1-2 times up through 9 months or even a year. I am always surprised when people tell me their pediatrician told them their baby no longer needs to eat at night at just 3 months old. They have small tummies and I know adults who have trouble going 12 hours without eating! Obviously, some babies are ready this early, but not all of them.

I, personally, night-weaned my eldest son when he stopped going right back to sleep at 4 a.m. and decided it was disrupting his sleep too much. However, even after night-weaning, he continued to wake in the 5 o'clock hour up through a year old 3-4 times per week. I tried to fully night-wean him, but in the end decided it

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was best for both of us to feed him and then put him back down for another 1-2 hours. He was finally able to go all night on his own around his first birthday. *My philosophy is to sleep train to fix problems, but not make a child go hungry if they can't comfortably go all night without nutrition.*

For optimum sleep at night, choose zero, one or two times to feed your child and don't at any other time in the night. You are choosing the number of times based on what you know about YOUR child. The theory behind this is that you are helping your baby feel hungry at appropriate times at night. Imagine you have lunch every day at 11 a.m. Naturally, after some time, you will be used to eating at that time every single day out of habit. Now, imagine, you want to start having lunch at 12:30 p.m., instead. It might take some time, but your body will adjust and you can move your lunch hour.

Concluding Remarks

I hope that you have found this pamphlet helpful and that your baby is on a good path to healthy sleeping. If your little one is still struggling, keep in mind that all babies are unique and what works for one may not work for another. This book deals with basic sleeping issues and solutions. If you think your child needs more help for a specific challenge, trust your instincts, as you know your baby best.

The Baby Sleep Site[®] is here for you, providing customized baby sleep solutions and strong community. Sometimes you're just too tired or too close to your situation to solve your issue on your own. I'm here to assist you in your journey, as it's my goal to help you and your baby sleep better.

Take a look at all of our resources. I wish you the best of luck!

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About the Author



My name is Nicole Johnson and I am a married mother of two wonderful boys, as well as the Senior Baby Sleep Consultant and owner of The Baby Sleep Site[®].

When my eldest son was a baby, he had a lot of sleep problems. Sleep like a baby? Yeah, right! You had better hope you never sleep like my baby did. He would wake up every one or two hours, *all night long*. I had to do so much to get him through the night.

By thoroughly researching the key literature and scientific reports, I became an expert in sleep methods, scheduling routines, baby and toddlers's development needs and more. I overcame my son's sleeping issues in a way that matched my own parenting style, and knew it was my mission to help other tired parents "find their child's sleep."

I started by leading an Internet-based message board and helped countless parents just like you overcome their own sleeping challenges much quicker and faster than I had. I then created this website in 2008 and expanded my offerings to include e-books, articles, a blog, and customized sleep consulting. The feedback around the world has been incredible!

I would love to help you with your challenge. Know that I never offer one-size-fits-all advice or pass judgment on your parenting philosophies. I incorporate who you are and what your child is undergoing to create a unique service. And I will give you the support you need to see your challenge through to the end.

If you have any questions or comments on this guide, please e-mail contact@babysleepsite.com.

Additional Support

Not all babies respond as quickly as others, so as part of The Baby Sleep Site[®] community, I invite you to take advantage of:

- For both new parents and parents who are expecting again, *Essential Keys to Your Newborn's Sleep* is a practical, hands-on e-Book with tips about how you can influence some of the factors that affect a newborn's sleep and for setting the stage for better sleep, both now and throughout the first year. <http://babysleepsite.com/newborn-essential-keys>
- For those persistent nighttime struggles, *The 3-Step System to Help Your Baby Sleep*, is a comprehensive e-Book that allows you to bypass the lengthy books currently on the market and start getting your child to sleep today. (<http://www.babysleepswell.com>)
- *Mastering Naps and Schedules*, a comprehensive guide to napping routines, nap transitions, and all the other important “how-tos” of good baby sleep. With over 40 sample sleep schedules and planning worksheets, *Mastering Naps and Schedules* is a hands-on tool ideal for any parenting style. (<http://www.babynapswell.com>)
- With *The 5-Step System to Better Toddler Sleep*, get back in control with this comprehensive toddler sleep guide. Toolkit of strategies, sample schedules, and sleep logs will put your toddler on the right sleep track. <http://www.toddlersleepswell.com/>
- For personalized advice and support for your unique situation, at an affordable price, consider our sleep consulting services (<http://www.babysleepsite.com/services>). Read parent stories (<http://www.babysleepsite.com/testimonials>) and our FAQ (<http://www.babysleepsite.com/sleep-helpdesk-faq/>).
- Join our *Members Area* packed with premium content and resources: e-Books, assessments, detailed case studies, peer support, and more. **Costs less to join than buying products separately!** (<http://www.babysleepsite.com/become-a-member>)
- Our regularly updated blog, which contains *free* articles on topics related to infants, toddlers, and sleep. (<http://babysleepsite.com/blog>)
- Visit us on Facebook where parents come together to support one another and answer questions. (<http://facebook.com/baby.sleep.help>)

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