

Sleep in Infants (2–12 Months)

WHAT TO EXPECT

Infants sleep between 9 and 12 hours during the night and nap between 2 and 5 hours during the day. At 2 months, infants take between two and four naps each day, and by 12 months, they take either one or two naps. Expect factors such as illness or a change in routine to disrupt your baby's sleep. Developmental milestones, including pulling to standing and crawling, may also temporarily disrupt sleep.

By 6 months of age, most babies are physiologically capable of sleeping through the night and no longer require nighttime feedings. However, 25%–50% continue to awaken during the night. When it comes to waking during the night, the most important point to understand is that all babies wake briefly between four and six times. Babies who are able to soothe themselves back to sleep (“self-soothers”) awaken briefly and go right back to sleep. In contrast, “signalers” are those babies who awaken their parents and need help getting back to sleep. Many of these signalers have developed inappropriate sleep onset associations and thus have difficulty self-soothing. This is often the result of parents developing the habit of helping their baby to fall asleep by rocking, holding, or bringing the child into their own bed. Over time, babies may learn to rely on this kind of help from their parents in order to fall asleep. Although this may not be a problem at bedtime, it may lead to difficulties with your baby failing back to sleep on her own during the night.

SAFE SLEEP PRACTICES FOR INFANTS

- Place your baby on his or her back to sleep at night and during naptime.
- Place your baby on a firm mattress in a safety-approved crib with slats no greater than 2-³/₈ inches apart.
- Make sure your baby's face and head stay uncovered and clear of blankets and other coverings during sleep. If a blanket is used, make sure the baby is placed “feet-to-foot” (feet at the bottom of the crib, blanket no higher than chest-level, blanket tucked in around mattress) in the crib. Remove all pillows from the crib.
- Create a “smoke-free-zone” around your baby.
- Avoid overheating during sleep and maintain your baby's bedroom at a temperature comfortable for an average adult.
- Remove all mobiles and hanging crib toys by about the age of 5 months, when your baby begins to pull up in the crib.
- Remove crib bumpers by about 12 months, when your baby can begin to climb.

HOW TO HELP YOUR INFANT SLEEP WELL

- **Learn your baby's signs of being sleepy.** Some babies fuss or cry when they are tired, whereas others rub their eyes, stare off into space, or pull on their ears. Your baby will fall asleep more easily and more quickly if you put her down the minute she lets you know that she is sleepy.

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- **Decide on where your baby is going to sleep.** Try to decide where your baby is going to sleep for the long run by 3 months of age, as changes in sleeping arrangements will be harder on your baby as he gets older. For example, if your baby is sleeping in a bassinet, move him to a crib by 3 months. If your baby is sharing your bed, decide whether to continue that arrangement.
- **Develop a daily sleep schedule.** Babies sleep best when they have consistent sleep times and wake times. Note that cutting back on naps to encourage nighttime sleep results in overtiredness and a worse night's sleep.
- **Encourage use of a security object.** Once your baby is old enough (by 12 months), introduce a transitional/love object, such as a stuffed animal, a blanket, or a t-shirt that was worn by you (tie it in a knot). Include it as part of your bedtime routine and whenever you are cuddling or comforting your baby. Don't force your baby to accept the object, and realize that some babies never develop an attachment to a single item.
- **Develop a bedtime routine.** Establish a consistent bedtime routine that includes calm and enjoyable activities, such as a bath and bedtime stories, and that you can stick with as your baby gets older. The activities occurring closest to "lights out" should occur in the room where your baby sleeps. Also, avoid making bedtime feedings part of the bedtime routine after 6 months.
- **Set up a consistent bedroom environment.** Make sure your child's bedroom environment is the same at bedtime as it is throughout the night (e.g., lighting). Also, babies sleep best in a room that is dark, cool, and quiet.
- **Put your baby to bed drowsy but awake.** After your bedtime routine, put your baby to bed drowsy but awake, which will encourage her to fall asleep independently. This will teach your baby to soothe herself to sleep, so that she will be able to fall back to sleep on her own when she naturally awakens during the night.
- **Sleep when your baby sleeps.** Parents need sleep also. Try to nap when your baby naps, and be sure to ask others for help so you can get some rest.
- **Contact your doctor if you are concerned.** Babies who are extremely fussy or frequently difficult to console may have a medical problem, such as colic or reflux. Also, be sure to contact your doctor if your baby ever seems to have problems breathing.