

Getting a good night's sleep

Baby sleep advice

Some babies sleep much more than others. Some sleep for long periods, others in short bursts. Some soon sleep through the night and some don't for a long time. Your baby will have their own pattern of waking and sleeping, and it's unlikely to be the same as other babies you know. It's also unlikely to fit in with your need for sleep, so it's a good idea to try to sleep when your baby sleeps.



If you're breastfeeding, in the early weeks your baby is likely to doze off for short periods during a feed. Carry on feeding until you think your baby has finished or until they're fully asleep. This is a good opportunity to try to get a bit of rest yourself.

If you're not sleeping at the same time as your baby, don't worry about keeping the house silent while they sleep. It's good to get your baby used to sleeping through a certain amount of noise.

It's a good idea to teach your baby that night time is different to daytime from the start.

Where should my baby sleep?

For the first six months, the safest place for your baby to be is in a cot in the same room as you when they're asleep, both day and night. Particularly in the early weeks, you may find that your baby only falls asleep in your or your partner's arms, or when you're standing by the cot. You can start getting your baby used to going to sleep without you comforting them by putting them down before they fall asleep or when they've just finished a feed. It may be easier to do this once your baby starts to stay alert more frequently or for longer.

During night feeds you may find it helpful to:

- Keep the lights down low
- Not talk much and keep your voice quiet
- Put your baby down as soon as they've been fed and changed
- Not change your baby unless they need it
- Get some ice cubes to suck
- Take off excessive layers of clothing – small babies or children may be left in a thin vest



Remember: babies should never sleep with a hot-water bottle or electric blanket, next to a radiator, heater or fire, or in direct sunshine.



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Choose the right care

Is it important to have a routine from the beginning?

Newborn babies will sleep on and off throughout the day and night. It can be helpful to have a pattern, but you can always change the routine to suit your needs. For example, you could try waking your baby for a feed just before you go to bed in the hope that you'll get a long sleep before they wake up again.

Establishing a bedtime routine

Getting your child into a simple, soothing bedtime routine when they're a baby can help prevent sleeping problems later on. The routine could consist of having a bath, changing into night clothes, feeding and having a cuddle before being put to bed. Your baby will learn how to fall asleep in their cot if you put them down when they're still awake rather than getting them to sleep by rocking or cuddling them in your arms. If they get used to falling asleep in your arms, they may need nursing back to sleep if they wake up again. As your child gets older, it can be helpful to keep to a similar bedtime routine. Too much excitement and stimulation just before bedtime can wake your child up again. Spend some time winding down and doing some calmer activities, like reading.

An example of a routine could be:

- A bath, then put on night clothes
- Supper or a milky drink
- Brush their teeth
- Go to bed
- Bedtime story
- Put their comforter (dummy, cuddly toy or security blanket) nearby, then
- A goodnight kiss and cuddle



How much sleep is enough?

This list is a rough guide to the average amount of sleep that babies and children need during a 24-hour period, including daytime naps. Babies' and children's sleep patterns vary. No two babies are the same. Some babies - including yours - may need more or less sleep than others.

Birth to three months

Most newborn babies are asleep more than they are awake. Their total daily sleep varies, but can be from eight hours, up to 16-18 hours. Babies will wake during the night because they need to be fed. Being too hot or too cold can also disturb their sleep.

Three to six months

As your baby grows, they'll need fewer night feeds and be able to sleep for longer. Some babies will sleep for eight hours or longer at night. By four months, they could be spending around twice as long sleeping at night as they do during the day.

Six to 12 months

At this age, night feeds may no longer be necessary, and some babies will sleep for up to 12 hours at night. Teething discomfort or hunger may wake some babies during the night.

12 months

Babies will sleep for around 12-15 hours in total.

Two years

Most two-year-olds will sleep for 11-12 hours at night, with one or two naps in the daytime.

Three to four years

Most will need about 12 hours sleep, but this can range from 8 hours up to 14. Some young children will still need a nap during the day.



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Choose the right care

Coping with disturbed nights

Disturbed nights can be very hard to cope with. If you have a partner, ask them to help. If you're formula feeding, encourage your partner to share the feeds. If you're breastfeeding, ask your partner to take over the early morning changing and dressing so that you can go back to sleep. Once you're into a good breastfeeding routine, you could try expressing milk and let a partner/friend occasionally give the baby this milk during the night. If you're on your own, you could ask a friend or relative to stay for a few days so that you can sleep. If your baby is having problems sleeping or you need more advice about getting into a routine, speak to your GP, midwife or health visitor.

Reducing the risk of cot death (sudden infant death syndrome)

It's not known why some babies die suddenly and for no apparent reason from what's known as cot death or sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Experts do know that placing a baby to sleep on their back reduces the risk and that exposing a baby to cigarette smoke or overheating a baby increases the risk. Cot death is rare, so don't let worrying about it stop you enjoying your baby's first few months. Follow the advice below to reduce the risks as much as possible.

To reduce the risk of cot death:

- Place your baby on their back to sleep, in a cot in the room with you
- Don't smoke during pregnancy or let anyone smoke in the same room as your baby
- Don't share a bed with your baby if you've been drinking alcohol, if you take drugs or if you're a smoker
- Never sleep with your baby on a sofa or armchair
- Don't let your baby get too hot (or too cold).

Overheating can increase the risk of cot death. Babies can overheat because of too much bedding or clothing, or because the room is too hot. When you check your baby, make sure they're not too hot. If your baby is sweating or their tummy feels hot to touch, take off some of their bedding. Don't worry if your baby's hands or feet feel cool - this is normal. Babies lose excess heat through their heads, so make sure their heads can't be covered by bedclothes during sleep periods. Remove hats and extra clothing as soon as you come indoors or enter a warm car, bus or train, even if it means waking your baby.

- Keep your baby's head uncovered. Their blanket should be tucked in no higher than their shoulders
- Place your baby in the 'feet to foot' position (with their feet at the end of the cot or pram)
- The safest place for your baby to sleep is on their back in a cot in a room with you for the first six months
- Place your baby on their back to sleep from the very beginning, for both day and night sleeps. This will reduce the risk of cot death. It's not as safe for babies to sleep on their sides as on their backs. Healthy babies placed on their backs are not more likely to choke
- When your baby is old enough to roll over, don't prevent them from doing so.

The risks of bed sharing

The safest place for your baby to sleep for the first six months is in a cot in a room with you. Don't share a bed with your baby if you or your partner:

- Are smokers (no matter where or when you smoke and even if you never smoke in bed)
- Have recently drunk alcohol
- Have taken medication or drugs that make you sleep more heavily
- Feel very tired

The risks of bed sharing are also increased if your baby was premature (born before 37 weeks), or was of low birth weight (less than 2.5kg or 5.5lb). There's also a risk that you might roll over in your sleep and suffocate your baby. Or your baby could get caught between the wall and the bed, or roll out of an adult bed and be injured.

Feeding and dummies

Breastfeeding your baby reduces the risk of cot death. It's possible that using a dummy at the start of any sleep period reduces the risk of cot death. However, the evidence is not strong and not all experts agree that dummies should be promoted. Don't give your baby a dummy until breastfeeding is well established, up to around six weeks. Stop giving them the dummy when they're between 6 and 12 months old.



For more information, help and support go to www.choosewellmanchester.org.uk or visit NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk

Choose the right care

What to do next...



Choose care at home if...

- Your baby sleeps well
- Your baby's sleeping is erratic or unpredictable - this is normal. Establishing a routine may help
- Your baby has a cot in the room with you
- Your baby will only sleep when being held - try putting them in their cot just before they fall asleep, or just after a feed)



Choose your health visitor or GP if...

- Your baby is having problems sleeping
- You need more advice about getting into a routine



Call 999 A&E if...

- There are no reasons why you should need to go to A&E for problems with sleeping
- A&E is for urgent, life-threatening illness and injury



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Choose the right care