The truth about baby’s sleep

Babies are not designed to sleep through the night! When babies wake they reset their vital systems (breathing, pulse, blood pressure, etc), this is a protective factor against SUDI. ‘Sleeping through the night’ may not happen for many months or years and for a new baby, a 5 hour stretch of sleep is a full night.

At 3 months old around 80% of babies wake up at night and need their parents’ help to get back to sleep. At 6 months old about 75% of babies regularly wake up at night and need help to get back to sleep. At 1 year old around 50% of babies still wake up at night and need help to get back to sleep. Up to 4 years old, about a third of children will still sometimes wake up at night and need help to get back to sleep.

Baby sleep tips:

• **Babies sleep when they are tired**—it’s that simple! You can do little to force a baby to sleep when they are not tired.

• **It’s natural for baby to fall asleep while sucking**—which might be at the breast, dummy or bottle. If you wish to avoid this natural sleep association then let baby suck until they are sleepy (but not totally asleep) then remove the breast, dummy or bottle so baby can finish falling asleep without it.

• **Babies make lots of sleeping sounds**—from grunts, laughing, whimpers to cries. Not all these sounds mean that baby is waking up. Learn their sleepy noises from awake noises. If baby is awake, tend & feed them so baby will go back to sleep easily. If baby is asleep—let them sleep!

• **Babies cannot tell day from night**—help them to tell the difference between the longer night-time sleeps and shorter daytime naps. Have baby take daytime naps in a lit room where baby can hear household noises. At night, keep the room dark, have very little interaction during feeds and you may like to have a little white noise (background hum like a fan/static radio).

• **Watch for baby’s tired signs**—an overtired baby is an unhappy baby and difficult to settle. Put baby down to sleep as soon as they show tired signs. If baby is often kept awake, they will develop sleep deprivation and it can interfere with developing sleep maturity. Sleepy signs include losing interest in people and toys, quieting down, fussing, tightly clenched fists, yawning, looking glazed and rubbing eyes.

• **Ensure baby’s temperature stays just right**—babies will often wake if they become too cold or could be vulnerable to SUDI if they become too hot. Use cotton, lightweight woollen or merino blankets for breathability & warmth, avoid synthetic materials that do not breathe like polarfleece and minkie. The room baby sleeps in should be kept between 16 and 20 degrees Celsius, if using a heater make sure it has a separate thermostat.

• **Remember it’s not forever**—relax about night wakings, they are totally normal! Everything is just stage and before you know it your newborn won’t be so little anymore. Just take it one day at a time and improvement will come.

How much sleep does my baby need?

A newborn baby sleeps around 16—18 hours a day which is distributed evenly over six to seven brief sleep periods. By 1 month old, baby will sleep around 15—16 hours a day which may be broken into 3 naps and 8—10 hours of night-time sleep. At 3 months old, baby will sleep around 15 hours a day, again broken into 3 naps and 10—11 hours of night-time sleep. At 6 months old, baby will sleep around 14—15 hours a day which may be broken into 2 naps and 10—11 hours of night-time sleep.

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How can I protect my baby?

As parents, we have the responsibility of protecting our baby—SUDI is preventable. Ensure that for every sleep your baby is safe. Check:

- Is my baby in a safe place?
- Have I put my baby down to sleep face-up?
- Is there room around my baby’s face?
- Have I noticed and removed or avoided any hazards?
- Does my baby have a sober person with them?
- Is there no chance of my baby getting onto their side or tummy?
- Is my baby close by me?¹

Safe Beds

Use light bedding that is breathable, avoiding duvets or quilts. Tuck the bedding in securely and remove pillows, cot bumpers and soft toys from the cot. These can get trapped against baby’s face, reducing their oxygen supply. Mattresses should be firm and fit snugly—make sure there are no gaps for your baby to become trapped in³.

When making baby’s bed, only make up the bottom half of the bed and place baby to sleep with their feet at the bottom of the bed—this reduces the risk of them wriggling down under the blankets³. Use a Wahakura or Pepi-pod when bed-sharing to keep your baby safer.

Sleep Hazards

- Unsafe position: Propped, side or tummy positions, between pillows or on cushions...
- Unsafe surfaces: Soft mattresses, bean bags, water beds, V-pillows, thin plastic...
- Unsafe places: Couches, chairs, in a room alone, with less-aware parents, with siblings, make shift beds near walls...
- Unsafe bedding: Pillows, loose covers, duvets, cushions, loosely fitting mattress, toys...²

Head Shape

Your baby’s skull is thin and soft, and as such flat spots can develop when the head rests on one part of the head for most of the time. To protect your baby’s head shape, ensure that when you place them down to sleep that the head position is varied. Remember: “Back for sleep, front for play, upright for cuddles and hugs.”¹²