

Sleep in Infants (2–12 Months)

WHAT TO EXPECT

Babies, on average, sleep between 12 to 13 hours across the day and night. They nap around 3 to 4 hours during the day. Especially in the first year, though, there are big differences in how much individual babies sleep. At 2 months, babies usually take between two and four naps each day. By 12 months, they take either one or two naps. Expect things like illness or a change in routine to disrupt your baby's sleep. Developmental milestones, including pulling to standing and crawling, may also disrupt sleep.

By 6 months of age, most healthy full-term babies are able to sleep through the night. They no longer require middle-of-the-night feedings. However, 25% to 50% of babies continue to wake up during the night. It is important to understand that all babies naturally wake up briefly between 2 and 6 times a night. Babies who are able to soothe themselves back to sleep (“self-soothers”) wake up for a few minutes and go right back to sleep on their own. In contrast, “signalers” are those babies who cry or fuss, wake up their parents, and need their help to get back to sleep. Many of these babies have not developed the ability to fall asleep on their own. They have difficulty self-soothing. This is often the result of developing the habit of needing to be rocked, held, or fed to sleep. Over time, babies may learn to rely on this kind of help to be able to fall asleep. Although this may not be a problem at bedtime, it may lead to problems falling back to sleep on their own during the night.

Safe Sleep Practices for Infants

- Place your baby on her back to sleep at night and during naptimes.
- Place your baby on a firm mattress with a well-fitting sheet in a safety-approved crib with slats no greater than 2³/₈ 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 your 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. Consider using a sleeper rather than a blanket.
- Remove all pillows and stuffed toys from the crib.
- Create a “smoke-free-zone” around your baby.
- Avoid overheating your baby when asleep. 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.
- If you choose to share a bed with your infant, please discuss this with your baby's doctor. You want to make sure you are doing so in the safest possible way. For example, you should not share a bed with your baby if you are taking sedating medications, have consumed alcohol, or if you smoke.
- Never have your baby sleep on a chair, couch, or on any furniture that is not designed specifically for sleeping.

HOW TO HELP YOUR INFANT SLEEP WELL

- **Learn your baby's signs of being sleepy:** Some babies fuss or cry when they are tired. 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.
- **Decide where your baby is going to sleep:** Try to decide by 3 months of age where your baby is going to sleep over the long run. Changes in sleeping arrangements will be harder on your baby as she gets older. For example, if your baby is sleeping in a bassinet, move her to a crib by 3 months. For a variety of reasons, including ease of breast-feeding, some parents prefer to have their baby sleep in bed with them. If your baby is sharing your bed, decide whether you want to continue this arrangement and make sure you are doing so in the safest way possible.
- **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 often results in overtiredness and a worse night's sleep.
- **Encourage use of a security object:** Once your baby is old enough (by age 12 months), introduce a transitional or love object, such as a stuffed animal or a blanket. Include it as part of your bedtime routine, at naptime, and whenever you are cuddling or comforting your baby. Don't force your baby to accept the object. 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. Pick one 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. If an evening feeding is part of the bedtime routine, make the feeding the first step in the routine. Avoid letting your baby fall asleep while nursing or bottle-feeding.
- **Set up a consistent bedroom environment:** Make sure your child's bedroom environment is the same at bedtime as it is throughout the night, such as lighting. Also, babies sleep best in a room that is dark, cool, and quiet.
- **Put your baby to bed awake:** Starting at about 3 months, put your baby to bed *awake* after your bedtime routine. This practice will encourage her to soothe herself to sleep and fall asleep independently, without needing to be held or fed or rocked. Babies who learn to fall asleep on their own at bedtime are able to fall back to sleep without parents' help when they naturally awaken 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 during the night.