

Sleeping

Newborn babies sleep a lot, usually waking up every 2 to 4 hours for feedings. At about 2 months of age, they generally start sleeping through the night, although a few cooperative babies start sooner. Sleeping through the night means different things to parents with newborns than to the rest of the world. Sleeping from midnight to 6AM is a good night. You may have heard that starting solid food will make a baby sleep easier: there's no evidence that this is true.

Between 5 and 7 months of age, your baby may disappoint you by starting to wake once again during the night. This isn't backsliding. It's a normal developmental phase. Let her stay in her bed, comfort her, pat her on the back and change her if needed. The pattern of nighttime sleeping will soon return.

Sleep Problems

Newborn infants have irregular sleep cycles, which take about 6 months to mature. While newborns sleep an average of 16 to 17 hours per day, they may only sleep 1 or 2 hours at a time. As children get older, the total number of hours they need for sleep decreases. However, different children have different needs. It is normal even for a 6 month old to wake up briefly during the night, but these awakenings should only last a few minutes and children should be able to go back to sleep on their own. Here are some suggestions that may help your baby (and you) sleep better at night:

- 1. Try to keep her as calm and quiet as possible.** When feeding or changing your baby during the night, avoid stimulating her or waking her up too much so she can easily fall back to sleep.
- 2. Don't let your infant sleep as long during the day.** If she sleeps for large blocks of time during the day, she will be more likely to be awake during the night.
- 3. Put your baby into the crib at the first signs of drowsiness.** Ideally it is best to let the baby learn to relax and settle herself to sleep. If you make a habit of holding or rocking her until she falls asleep, she may learn to need you to get back to sleep when she wakes up in the middle of the night. This may interfere with her learning to settle herself and fall asleep alone.
- 4. Try to avoid putting your baby to bed with a pacifier.** Your baby may get used to falling asleep with it and have trouble learning to settle herself without it. Pacifiers should be used to satisfy the baby's need to suck, not to help a baby sleep. If your baby falls asleep with a pacifier, gently remove it before putting her in bed.
- 5. Ideally, by a few weeks of age a baby should sleep in a separate room from his parents.**

If your baby is ill, these suggestions should be relaxed. After she feels better, begin to reestablish sleep patterns.

Sleep position and SIDS

Parents and caregivers should now consider placing healthy infants on their backs when putting them down to sleep. This is because recent studies have shown an increased incidence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in infants who sleep on their stomachs. There is no evidence that sleeping on the back is harmful to healthy infants.

Keep the following points in mind:

- Placing a child to sleep on the back has the lowest risk and is preferred. Sleeping on the side, however, is a reasonable alternative and is safer than sleeping on the stomach.
- Do not place your infant to sleep on soft surfaces or with pillows or stuffed toys. They could cover your child's *airway*.
- This recommendation is for healthy infants. Some infants with certain medical conditions or malformations may need to be placed on their stomachs to sleep. Talk to your pediatrician about which sleeping position is best for your child.
- This recommendation is for *sleeping* infants. A certain amount of 'tummy time,' while the baby is awake and observed, is recommended.