

Setting the Stage for Better Sleep: Parent and Baby

When is my baby going to sleep through the night? When will I get more sleep as a parent? Sleep deprivation for new parents seems to be more the norm than the exception. Lack of sleep compromises a parent's mood, their ability to manage their anger and irritability, and may contribute to postpartum depression and perinatal mood disorders. So what are normal sleep patterns for an infant? How can you help your baby sleep if she/he has difficulty and therefore improve your sleep? Should the baby cry it out and will you "spoil your baby" by responding to her/him? Although your baby is uniquely sensitive and has her own temperaments, there are some similarities in what babies (and parents) need to get to sleep easily. Parents can consider the following main points when sleep is an obstacle:



1. **What is the sleeping routine?** Perhaps you and other members of your household

already have a sleeping routine in place (ie. Change clothes, read a book, brush teeth go to bed at 10pm each night) or perhaps you go to bed whenever you are tired and haven't thought much about what you do before sleep.

- ❖ Think about what routine you would like to put into place and try to be as consistent as possible.
- ❖ If your baby is sleeping less than 3 solid hours at night, consider a routine nap time during the day (ie. After feedings throughout the day, after playing or an outing, etc.).
- ❖ When developing a routine, think about what relaxes and soothes your baby. What relaxes you and helps you get to sleep?

2. **What is the normal sleep pattern for a baby at her age?**

- ❖ Most babies under 3 months will fall asleep within 10-15 minutes of being fussy or showing tired cues (yawning, tired eyes, glazed look, etc.).
- ❖ He may doze off after being fed or after a lot of activity and meeting new people.
- ❖ A transitional object such as a pacifier, soft blanket or soft toy might help sooth a crying baby that is tired and cranky.
- ❖ NOTE: make sure the baby's crib or sleeping area is free from objects such as blankets, pillows and toys!
- ❖ As your baby gets older and you develop a more consistent sleep routine, notice if your baby

suddenly can't sleep during routine hours. Ask your pediatrician to discuss normal developmental changes if you notice a drastic change in your baby's sleep routine.

- ❖ Many children around preschool age and toward kindergarten take less and less naps. Your child's cues will tell you whether a nap is needed.

3. **What is a normal sleep schedule for my unique baby?**

- ❖ Pay attention to your baby's cues for being tired, hungry, or ready to play. You may notice this happens around the same time each day and night.
- ❖ Always respond to a crying baby when they are 3 months and younger.
- ❖ A baby can be put in a crib after 3 months without being asleep, so you can monitor when the best nap times are for your child as they get older. Tired cues can also include: rubbing of the eyes, looking for the transitional object for comfort, sucking on pacifier or finger, and an overly sensitive or moody toddler.
- ❖ Once you're on a sleep schedule that works for the both of you, stick to it! As a child develops, their need for consistency becomes more and more important.

If you are still having difficulty with the sleep schedule of your 0-24 month old child, ask your pediatrician if they use a "Sleep Activity Record" or other assessment to confirm that all is healthy and normal. As the parent, you are your child's best advocate, and you are the first to know when there is a concern. Getting enough sleep is part of a

healthy lifestyle and it is never too early to teach your baby the importance of this routine (and maybe a good reminder for your sleep as an adult!)



Chai Benson has a Masters of Science in Child Development and Family Studies, is Certified Infant Massage Teacher, and an Infant Mental Health Specialist. She works with couples, families and children in downtown Long Beach as a Registered Marriage and Family Therapy Intern (IMF 53833) and is supervised under Irene Lara Gutierrez (LCS 19080). She also organizes and facilitates group support on infant massage, postpartum depression and anger management.