

## Sleep and your baby

The biggest challenge facing new parents is to cope with broken sleep, night after night. Newborn babies need feeding and changing at regular intervals, 24 hours a day, but it is worth remembering that the sleepless nights don't last. Your baby will eventually settle into a routine of sleeping through the night, if he or she is used to a familiar routine.

### Up to six months of age

Some suggestions for settling your baby include:

- Always put your baby to sleep on their back.
- Try to get your baby to nap at the same times each day.
- Night-time sleeping patterns are learned, so decide on a routine for your baby and try to stick to it.
- Relax your baby before bed with massage, bathing or soft music.
- Set out clean nappies, wipes and a change of clothes before you go to bed, so you won't have to search around baby's room in the night.

### Six to 12 months of age

Some suggestions on settling your older baby include:

- Continue to stick to a regular night-time routine.
- Once you put the baby down, don't draw out your goodnights or establish bedtime as 'chat time'.
- A hungry baby will wake more often, so make sure he or she is eating enough during the day.

### Older children

Some suggestions to settle your toddler or older child include:

- Keep the bed for sleeping only, not for playing or relaxing.
- Don't punish children by sending them to their room, or they will feel badly about going to bed at night.
- Cut out or limit any naps later than mid-afternoon.
- If the dark makes your child anxious, a night-light can help.
- Occasionally review bedtime routines to make sure you're keeping up with your child's growing maturity.

### If your child still cries in the night

A crying child often gets extra cuddles. Over time, the child will sometimes cry in the night just for attention. Some child care experts recommend trying a controlled crying program. When the crying starts, wait five minutes before entering the room. Reassure and soothe the child, but don't pick them up or cuddle them. Leave the room quickly. If your child keeps crying or starts crying again, wait 10 minutes, then 15 minutes the next time. If your child wakes up later, start the process over again. Each night, make your child wait longer and longer before you go into their room. Your child will soon realise that night-time crying doesn't offer the same rewards anymore.

### Sharing the load

If you have a live-in partner, consider taking turns on 'night duty'. When it's your night off, wear earplugs. A good sleep, every second night, means that you'll be better able to cope when it's your turn. You can share night duty, even if you are breast-feeding, by expressing your milk into bottles.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Your paediatrician
- Child care nurse
- The Maternal and Child Health Line is available 24 hours a day Tel. 132 229.

## Things to remember

- Sleeping habits are learned, so try to set up a bedtime routine for your baby as soon as you can.
- The sleepless nights don't last.
- Consider taking turns with your partner, so you each get a good sleep every second night.

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Better Health Channel

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