



Bayside Medical Group, Inc.

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SLEEP

How to Help Your Baby Sleep Through the Night

How wonderful to have your infant go to bed without resistance and to sleep through the night! Some parents are quite lucky, and their baby sleeps all night long, right from an early age. However, most babies aren't so accommodating, and do need some help to learn how to sleep through the night. It is much easier to help your baby develop good sleep habits during the first six months than to correct bad sleep habits at an older age. Here are some of our guidelines.

Newborns

Put in crib drowsy but awake, rather than asleep. By allowing your infant to develop the skills to self-soothe from the drowsy state to the sleep state, you are empowering her* to be able to fall back asleep after normal nighttime awakenings.

Hold and comfort your infant for all fussy crying during the first 3 months. You cannot spoil your newborn, and in fact it is important for your newborn to develop this trust in you. Even if your baby has colic, there are some times during the day when she won't be crying – this is the ideal time to place her down in the crib to go to sleep.

Limit daytime naps to two consecutive hours. It is a good idea to wake your infant during the day if she is sleeping for more than two hours straight. This will encourage her to have long stretches of sleep during the night rather than during the daytime.

Make middle-of-the-night feedings boring. Avoid turning on the lights, talking to your baby or rocking her, because lots of stimulation may awaken her more and delay her transition back to sleep.

Place your newborn to sleep in the bed that you would like her to continue to sleep for the next several months. Infants can get accustomed to falling asleep in a particular bed. If you change the place where she sleeps, you may disrupt her

sleep pattern and she may have difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep in the future.

2-4 Month-Old Babies

Try to delay middle-of-the-night feedings. Not every whimper in the middle of the night means that your baby is hungry. At this stage, infants are usually eating more during the day, and may not need to eat as frequently at night. As they get bigger, they are able to store more energy overnight, making it possible to go much longer between feedings. When you hear your baby begin to stir, see if she can get back to sleep on her own before getting up to feed her. If she doesn't fall back asleep on her own, then get up to feed her.

4-6 Month-Old Babies

Try to discontinue middle-of-the-night feedings. Many infants will be able to sleep for an eight-hour stretch at night by six months old. Allow your infant to try to self-soothe first before feeding her. If you do feed her, make the encounter brief and boring. Feeding one last time right before your own bedtime can sometimes encourage a long stretch of sleep that is synchronized with your own!

6-9 Month-Old Babies

Confront separation anxiety. When your baby cries at bedtime, or wakes up after being put to bed, reassure her that you are available by talking with her and letting her see you briefly. However, keep the encounter brief and boring, and avoid picking her up, feeding her or rocking her. It's OK to change her diaper if necessary, but then put her right back in the crib. At this age your infant should learn to self-soothe, and should be able to do so once she is assured that you are nearby.

If your infant is hysterical when you leave, it is OK to stay in the room until she falls asleep, but remember not to nurse her or rock her. It is also OK to leave the room, with calm, reassuring

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comments, and then check back every 10 or 15 minutes if she hasn't stopped crying. But each time, act the same way: gently reassure her, tell her she has to go to sleep, and then leave again. The important thing is not "hypnotize" her back to sleep, such as by feeding or rocking her, so that she can learn to do it herself.

1-Year-Old Children and Older

Stick with your bedtime routine. Toddlers respond well to structure and a predictable schedule, even though they often like to test limits. It is best to stick with one bedtime ritual.

Make sure they stay in their bed through the night. Some children will suffer from nightmares and bedtime fears that may make them want to join their parents in bed.

Never ignore your child's nightmares. Discuss her fears and concerns with her, and if this is a frequent problem try to determine if there might be a reason for nightmares, such as scary TV shows. However, it is always best to make sure that she returns to her own bed for sleep.

Recommended Books

Sleeping Through the Night, by Jodi Mindell

Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems, by Richard Ferber

Our experience with both of these sleep books has been excellent!

Good Night Sleep Tight: The Sleep Lady's Gentle Guide to Helping Your Child Go to Sleep, Stay Asleep, and Wake Up Happy (Paperback), by Kim West and Joanne Kenen

This book is a kinder, gentler transition for parents who aren't able to carry out the Gerber or Mindell methods. Good book!

Also, please visit our website Health Library for other recommended books about infant care: www.baysidemedical.com/bayside-health-library#lib-4

*In this handout we refer to baby girls for consistency, but everything applies equally to boys too!