

Sleep and Settling Baby

Royal Hospital for Women

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Sleep is a development task, and babies need help to learn good sleep habits. Parents often believe there is always an answer to making babies sleep and only one set of guidelines to follow. In fact, there isn't always an answer and there are several safe options for parents to consider if their baby's sleep pattern is causing problems.

Babies are all individual so the range of sleeping and waking they do varies considerably. Current advice is to have your baby sleep in the same room as you for the first few (up to six) months. When putting baby to bed sleep your baby on his or her back – positioned at the lower end of the bassinet/cot. Bedclothes are to be tucked in at the end of the bed to prevent your baby from pulling bedclothes over his or her head. The head of the bed is not to be raised, and there are to be no pillows or soft toys in the bed.

Signs of Tiredness

As babies become tired they begin to show signs that they are ready for bed. These signs are:

- Frown or facial grimace
- Jerky movements
- Clenched fists
- Grizzling

When some or all of these signs are seen it is time to put the baby into bed. Grizzling can be confused with boredom with the parent wanting to stimulate the baby, which can then cause over-tiredness and make it difficult to settle the baby. Check for the other signs to prevent this happening.

Most young babies have an unsettled time in the late afternoon or evenings. At these times you may want to try some ways to relax him or her. Strategies you could use are:

- Give the baby a deep relaxation bath;
- Give an extra feed;
- Hand baby over to your partner;
- Walk with the baby in a pouch.

Crying Baby

Crying is the only way a baby can tell you that he/she is upset or need you for something. Babies under six months don't cry to annoy you or get their own way – they are too young to think like this. Babies cry because they:

- Are hungry or thirsty;
- Are too hot or too cold
- Need a clean nappy
- Have a pain or feel unwell

- Feel scared or lonely
- Are overtired
- Want physical contact/comfort.

It's normal for babies to cry for a total of 2 hours a day, but some cry more. Crying is usually more in afternoons and evenings. Most babies become more settled at about 4 to 6 months. Remember that the crying won't last forever.

It's normal to feel helpless or stressed when you have tried the settling techniques and baby keeps crying. Just remember that babies are like anyone else – they take time to calm down when they are upset. If you begin to feel frustrated put the baby down in a safe place and go to another room for a short break. Don't feel guilty if you leave the baby to cry for a little while. When you go back you may find the baby is easier to calm. Encourage your partner and/or other family support to be involved in settling your baby.

Getting into a Pattern

For some identifying and following a pattern makes life with a new baby feel less chaotic. Many babies respond well to essentially the same things happening at around the same time every day. It helps to make them feel more secure.

Following a pattern means having a daily plan based on your baby's need to feed, sleep, and have a bath, play and some quiet awake time. Settling strategies are also a part of this as babies need to learn how to go to sleep and resettle themselves if they wake but are not hungry. By 6-8 weeks you'll usually see a pattern begin to happen by itself. This is because you're getting better at knowing what the baby needs and responding to this. Be aware that different babies have different patterns and that patterns will change as the baby grows.

Sleeping Through

Sleeping through is a confusing expression as it implies sleeping all night without stirring. Young babies have a sleep cycle of 40 to 60 minutes. A four hour sleep for a baby equals eight hours for an adult. As babies get older their sleep cycle lengthens, they also learn to move more easily from one sleep cycle to the next. The age at which this happens varies. Most babies continue to wake for at least one to two feeds at night in order to grow adequately and maintain their mother's milk supply.