



PREVENTION OF SLEEP PROBLEMS

Most parents believe that nighttime is for sleeping. They like 7 or 8 hours of uninterrupted sleep. They want their children to go to bed without resistance and sleep through the night. Sleep problems are much easier to prevent than to treat. Young children can be taught that nighttime is a special time for sleeping, that their crib is where they stay at night and that they can put themselves back to sleep. If you feel this way about sleep, consider the following suggestions:

Newborn Advice

1. Hold your baby for all fussy crying during the first 3 months. All new babies cry some during the day. If your baby cries excessively, the cause is probably colic. A crying baby should always be responded to. Gentle motion and cuddling seem to help the most. Babies can't be spoiled during the first 3 or 4 months of life.
2. Carry your baby for at least 3 hours a day when he isn't crying. This practice will reduce fussy crying and colic.
3. Do not let your baby sleep for more than 3 consecutive hours during the daytime. Attempt to awaken him gently and entertain him. In this way, the time when your infant sleeps the longest will occur during the night.
NOTE: Many newborns can sleep 5 consecutive hours.
4. Do not feed your baby if he cries and less than 2 ½ hours have passed since the previous formula feeding (2 hours for breast-fed). Crying is the only form of communication little babies have. Crying does not always mean your baby is hungry. He may be tired, bored, lonely or overheated. Hold your baby at these times or put him to bed. Don't let feeding become a pacifier. Babies who feed frequently during the day become hungry at frequent intervals during the night.
5. Make middle-of-the-night feeding brief and boring. You want your baby to think of the nighttime as a special time for sleeping. When he awakens at night for feeding, don't turn on the light, talk to him or rock him. Feed him quickly and quietly. Provide extra rocking and playtime during the day. This approach will lead to longer periods of sleep at night.
6. Place your baby in the crib, sleepy but awake (very important). His last waking memory should be of the crib, not of you or of being fed. He must learn to put himself to sleep without you being there. Don't expect him to go to sleep as soon as his head touches the mattress. You don't have to be present at this time. If he is sleepy, he can go to sleep on his own. If he is crying at bedtime, rocking may help to settle him down, but try to place him in the crib before he falls asleep. Naps should be handled the same way.
7. Don't change diapers during the night. Babies can survive until morning with a wet diaper. The significant exceptions to this rule are soiled diapers at night (which is uncommon) or a time when you are treating a bad diaper rash. If you must change your child, use a nightlight, do it quietly and don't provide any entertainment.
8. Don't let your baby sleep in your bed. Once your baby has gained such a privilege, change will be extremely difficult. For the first 2 months, you can keep your baby in a crib next to your bed.
9. Choose a late bedtime hour (like 10 or 11pm) and give the last feeding then. Try to keep your child awake for the 2 hours prior to this bedtime. Regularity of bedtime helps your baby organize his sleep.

Two-Month Advice

10. Move your baby's crib to a separate room. By 2 months of age at the latest, your baby should be sleeping in a separate room. This arrangement will help the parent who is a light sleeper. It also removes the availability of the parents from the visible options of the infant who awakens. If separate rooms are impractical, at least put up a screen or cover the crib railing with a light blanket.
11. Don't allow your baby to hold his bottle or take it to bed with him. Babies should have the idea the bottle belongs to the parents. A bottle in bed leads to middle-of-the-night crying, since your baby will inevitably reach for the bottle and find it empty or on the floor.
12. Try to delay middle-of-the-night feedings. At 2 months of age, begin to discourage the 2:00a.m. feeding by whatever means seems appropriate to you. Obviously, never awaken your baby at night for a feeding except at your bedtime. Before preparing a bottle, try holding him briefly to see if that will suffice. If you must feed, give an ounce or two less than a daytime feeding. Breast feeders should nurse for a shorter interval.



Four-Month Advice

13. Discontinue the 2:00a.m. feeding before it becomes a habit. By 4 months of age, your baby does not need to be fed more than 4 times a day (5 times for breast-fed babies). If you do not eliminate the night feeding at this time, it will invariably become more difficult to stop with each passing month. If your child cries during the night, don't feed him, just comfort him with a back rub and a few soothing words. Don't turn on the light, lift him out of the crib or remain for long. He needs to learn that the crib is where he stays at night. Some children need a little redirection to achieve a more mature sleep cycle. NOTE: Some breast-fed babies need the introduction of solids during the day to help them go without the nighttime nursing.
14. Make any middle-of-the-night contacts brief and boring. Minimize interactions with your child between 10p.m. and 6a.m. Otherwise, your child will not learn how to use his own resources to return to sleep. Remember that all children have 4 or 5 partial awakenings each night. If your baby's crying continues for more than 5 minutes, visit him but don't turn on the light, play with your child, or take him out of his crib. Try to act sleepy, make a few reassuring comments, and stay for less than 1 minute. If your child is standing in the crib, don't attempt to make him lie down. He can do this himself. This brief contact usually will not reinforce your baby sufficiently to perpetuate the demanding behavior. If the crying continues, you can check your baby again every 15 to 20 minutes, but be certain not to take him out of the crib nor stay in the room until he goes to sleep.

Six-Month Advice

15. Provide a friendly, soft toy as a crib companion or transitional object. Six months is the age when separation anxiety begins. This security object will provide comfort to your child when he awakens during the night.
16. Leave the door open to your baby's room. Children with separation anxiety become very fearful when they are in a closed space and are not sure that their parent is still available to them.
17. During the day, respond to separation fears with holding and reassurance. This extra physical contact will reduce nighttime fears. This step is especially important for working mothers.
18. For fearful babies, make middle-of-the-night contacts prompt and reassuring. For mild nighttime fears, check on your child promptly and be reassuring, but keep the interaction as brief as possible. In severe cases in which your child panics when you leave or vomits with crying, stay in your child's room until he is either calm or goes to sleep. Short of lifting your child out of the crib, provide whatever is needed for his comfort, keeping the light off and not talking too much.

One-Year Advice

19. Establish a pleasant and predictable bedtime ritual. While bedtime rituals can start in the early months, they become very important to the child by one year of age. Children need a familiar routine. Both parents can be involved at bedtime, taking turns with reading stories or making them up. Both parents should kiss and hug the child "goodnight". All of them want their security objects nearby. Finish the bedtime ritual before your child falls asleep.
20. Once put in bed, your child should stay there. Some older infants have bedtime temper tantrums. They may protest around bedtime or even refuse to lie down. You should overlook these protests and leave the room. You can ignore any ongoing questions or demands your child makes and solely enforce the rule that your child can't leave the bedroom. If your child comes out, return him quickly, avoid any conversation, skip the hug and kiss and hold the bedroom door closed for a few minutes. **Consistency will prevail.**
21. If your child has nightmares or bedtime fears, reassure him. In contrast to manipulative behavior, never punish or ignore fears. Everyone has 4 or 5 dreams a night some of these are good dreams and some are bad dreams. If nightmares become frequent, perhaps your child has watched a violent television show or movie.
22. Don't worry about the amount of sleep your child is getting. Sleep requirements vary greatly among different people and at different ages. The best assurance that your child is getting adequate sleep is that he is not tired during the day. Naps are important to young children, but keep them less than 2 hours each. Children give up their morning naps between 1 ½ and 2 years of age and their afternoon naps between 3 and 6 years of age. Some children may choose to substitute a "rest period" for the afternoon nap. If the "rest period" is discontinued before 5 years of age, most children can't stay awake or be civilized until their regular bedtime.
23. Switch from a crib to a bed at age 2 or 2 ½ years. Change sooner if your child learns how to climb out of a crib with the springs at the lowest setting. Until you find a bed, keep the crib railing down and place a chair next to the crib so your child can descend safely, or just put the mattress on the floor.

