

Sleep in Newborns (0-2 Months)

What to expect

Newborns sleep between 11 and 18 hours per day, with no regular or defined pattern. For the first few weeks, your baby will sleep anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours at a time, although babies who are breast-fed tend to sleep for shorter periods (2-3 hours of sleep) than bottle fed babies (3-4 hours). There will also be little difference between night and day in the first few weeks. However, you will start to see a more regular sleep schedule develop between 2 and 4 months of age. Expect your baby to be quite active while they sleep. This is perfectly normal, and your baby is getting sound sleep.

Where and how should your baby sleep?

- **Sleeping arrangements.** There are many choices as to where your newborn sleeps, whether in a bassinet or a crib in the parents' bedroom, a sibling's bedroom, or the baby's own room. Some parents prefer to have their baby sleep with them, although caution should be taken as there is a risk of suffocation.
- **Back to sleep.** All babies should be put to sleep on their backs to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

SAFE SLEEP PRACTICES FOR NEWBORNS

- Place your baby on his or her back to sleep at night and during naptime.
- Place your baby on a firm mattress in a safety-approved crib with slats no greater than 2-3/8 inches apart.
- Make sure your baby's face and head stay uncovered and clear of blankets and other coverings during sleep. If a blanket is used, make sure your baby is placed "feet-to-foot" (feet at the bottom of the crib, blanket no higher than chest-level, blanket tucked in around mattress) in the crib. Remove all pillows from the crib.
- Create a "smoke-free-zone" around your baby.
- Avoid overheating during sleep and maintain your baby's bedroom at a temperature comfortable for an average adult.

HOW TO HELP YOUR NEWBORN BECOME A GOOD SLEEPER

- **Learn your baby's signs of being sleepy.** Some babies fuss or cry when they are tired, whereas others rub their eyes, stare off into space, or pull on their ears. Your baby will fall asleep more easily and more quickly if you put her down to sleep when she lets you know that she is tired.
- **Encourage nighttime sleep.** Many newborns have their days and nights reversed, sleeping much of the day and being awake much of the night. To help your baby sleep more at night, keep lights dim during the night and keep play to a minimum. During the day, play with your baby and be sure to wake her regularly for feedings and play time.
- **Respond to your baby's needs.** Newborns often need to be rocked or fed to sleep, which is fine for the first few weeks or months. However, once your baby is 3 months old, begin to establish good sleep habits.
- **Develop a bedtime routine.** Even babies as young as a few weeks respond well to bedtime routines. Your newborn's bedtime routine should be soothing and can include any activities you choose, such as bathing, rocking, and cuddling.
- **Sleep when your baby sleeps.** Parents need sleep also. Try to nap when your baby naps, and be sure to ask others for help so that you can get some rest.
- **Contact your doctor if you are concerned.** Babies who are extremely fussy or frequently difficult to console may have a medical problem, such as colic or reflux. Also, be sure to contact your doctor if your baby ever seems to have problems breathing.

From: Mindell JA & Owens JA (2003). A Clinical Guide to Pediatric Sleep: Diagnosis and Management of Sleep Problems. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.