

Some Sleeping Tips for new parents!

Babies 0-6 months

In the first few weeks of a baby's life, many parents have concerns about erratic feeding, crying and difficulty settling their new baby. It is important to realise that many of the questions parents have about caring for their new baby, have no absolute right or wrong answers, rather a number of options. Babies need to be fed, loved, kept warm and clean, beyond these necessities; choices are up to the individual families. If things are working well for you, your baby is happy and thriving, then there is certainly no need to change things. If however, you are finding it difficult to cope, your baby is very unsettled and sleeping and feeding erratically then you can change things.

There are various strategies parents can use to help their baby to sleep better. Persistent problems may need professional advice.

Feed – Play – Sleep Routine – What it is and how do I get it!

Most new parents have heard about this elusive routine that babies are “supposed” to have. In reality, many babies do not settle happily into a routine of feeding 3-4 hourly and sleeping in between – these babies may need a little help to get the hang of it! In hospital babies tend to feed and then go back to sleep. As they get older they need less sleep and therefore if they fall asleep immediately after a feed, they may tend to wake earlier and therefore feed more and more frequently, resulting in less satisfying feeds, shorter sleeps and very exhausted parents! The good news is that you can teach your baby a more workable routine.

Introducing a playtime after feeds makes it enjoyable for babies and parents. This will often mean that you are not trying to put an alert awake baby to sleep, but rather wait until your baby shows signs of being tired before you put him/her down for (hopefully) a good sleep, moving towards the magical 3-4 hourly feed routine!

Playtime

Playtime for new babies consists of talking/singing to baby whilst he/she can see your face. As your baby gets older, he/she may enjoy some floor time with a baby gym, sitting in a baby chair/rocker with some interesting toys or sitting in a pram under some trees.

Tired Signs

It is very important to put your baby down to sleep when he/she is tired but not overtired. Learning to recognize your baby's tired signs and putting them down to sleep at the first sign of these is one of the most important steps to developing the feed, play, sleep routine. Tired signs may include:

- Yawning
- Jerky arm and leg movements
- Frowning
- Clenching fists
- Crying/grizzling

If you find it difficult to “read” your baby’s tired signs, use time as a guide. At 5-6 weeks, babies are usually tired after being up for 1 ½ hours. At 3-4 months this may be 2 hours. Refer to the Sleeping and Feeding Chart below.

General techniques to encourage baby to sleep

- Try to establish a sleep/bedtime routine
- Wrap baby
- Put baby to bed on his/her back (+/- dummy if used)
- If baby cries or grizzles use settling techniques:
 - Rocking
 - Patting
 - Stroking
 - Gently jiggle bassinette

Use this technique for 5 minutes before switching to new technique. Continue until baby is quiet and settled but not asleep. The aim is for your baby to eventually learn to fall asleep by him/herself.

- If baby starts to cry again, wait 2 minutes before returning and starting the settling techniques again.

What if my baby still doesn’t settle?

Learning a new pattern will take time for your baby. It is important to persist with the techniques, as picking your baby up if crying during the settling process will not help him/her to learn to sleep. Giving consistent sleep messages will help. Continue the settling techniques for 30-60minutes. If your baby is still not settled, try one of the following:

- Carry your baby in a sling. Not only is this very soothing for your baby, it also enables you to have your hands free to do other things. Often excellent for “colicky” babies.
- Take baby for a walk in the pram/ride in the car
- Give baby a relaxation bath. Have the bath as warm as you would for yourself and deep enough so baby can float. Try baby on his/her back and on tummy with head supported. Baby may still be upset when you take him/her out but hopefully more ready to sleep

If your new routine doesn't seem to be working, don't lose hope and revert back to your old methods. Check that you are sure about what you are doing, persist and remember that your baby will soon become familiar with the new routine. If you are at all unsure of how to proceed, seek professional advice and reassurance if necessary.

Where to get help

- Maternal and Child Health nurse
- Your doctor or pediatrician
- Parentline Tel. 132 289
- Tweddle Child and Family Health Service Tel. (03) 9689 1577
- Sids and Kids on 1300 308 307 or visit www.sidsandkids.org

Sleeping and Feeding Chart

This provides a general guide for frequency and duration of sleeps at various ages and frequency of feeds at various ages

Age	Average hours of sleep required per day	No. of sleeps per day	Awake time before needing a sleep (including feed & play)	Average duration of each sleep
1-4 weeks	16	4	1 hour	3 hours
1-3 months	15	3-4	1-1 ½ hours	2 ½ - 3 hours
3-6 months	8-10 at night	2-3	2-2 ½ hours	2 hours
6-12 months	10-12 at night	2	3-3 ½ hours	1 ½ - 2 hours
12 months plus	10-12 at night	1-2	4+ hours	1-1 ½ hours