

Sleep Tips for Newborns (and Parents!)

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*If I could singlehandedly revolutionize the idea of “Sleep Training”, the **very** first place I would begin is with prenatal education on maternity & newborn sleep, no question.*

Interestingly, expectant parents are inundated with information on topics ranging from prenatal yoga and packing a hospital bag, to breast-feeding and circumcision, but not the tiniest speck of proper information about what to expect that first night you are home, with regard to sleep.

We are simply told that there won't be any, once the baby arrives. We are told to “rest up for when the baby comes” (perhaps by someone who has never tried to sleep at the end of a third trimester). We are told to sleep when the baby sleeps. Right. And I'll cook when the baby cooks, and do laundry when she does too.

*For many families, just laying around napping with your baby for several weeks is not a realistic option. Life goes on: Mom or Dad go back to work, Grandparents fly home, and Sisters return to families of their own. This is a good reason (but certainly not the only one!) that establishing healthy sleep habits from day one is supremely important. Simply put... you need to eat, you need to shower, you need to heal, and you **most definitely** need to rest. Implementing a few simple things for your baby's sleep habits now, can truly eradicate the need for any sort of traditional “sleep training” down the road. I promise you, it is far easier to support your baby in learning healthy sleep habits now, than it is to change unhealthy ones later on. Here are a few key ways you can do just that:*

Short Awake Periods

For the first week or so, your newborn baby will seem to sleep all the time, but once they are able to stay awake for short periods, a very important thing to do is to keep wake times very short, even if they look like they can stay awake longer. You should lay them down to sleep no more than 45 minutes after they have woken, often less. If you wait until she is fussy, cranky or crying, you might actually be too late! Watch the clock when she wakes, regardless of how long she slept for. For now, her amount of awake time is more important than the time of day she is put down.

An overtired baby will have more trouble settling down and going to sleep (and staying asleep). Naps will be short at first, but because of their short awake times, it is pretty easy to set the Wake, Eat, Play, Sleep routine in place, since they will probably sleep before they need to eat again.

As much as possible, avoid creating a suck to sleep association

This is our absolute number one tip, when working with expectant families and newborns. Don't get me wrong; I am a huge proponent of breastfeeding, and having that special bond with your baby, so nurse away!

What we **do** suggest is nursing them when they first wake, then “play” a little bit (also known as staring at things and pooping), and then back off to sleep they go. If you do nurse/feed them again before they conk out – just try to wake them a wee bit before you lay them down. Laying them down before they are overtired, and before they are sleeping, is the best early introduction to those crucial self soothing skills they will need in life.

We want them to associate nursing with care-giving, having their needs met, bonding with you, being loved, and so on...but not necessarily to associate nursing with sleep. A suck-to-sleep association can be very difficult to break down the road, and is usually met with more resistance the older the baby gets.

Babies that do form that association tend to wake up after a single sleep cycle (30 to 40 minutes) so can have incredibly broken sleep and short naps too. *Why?* Because they are no longer sucking and so they wake to look for it, thinking it's the only way they can sleep. This also creates the nurse all night (rather than out of need) phenomenon.

That being said, newborns fall asleep nursing or feeding **all the time**. So the best you can do at first is to try to feed after waking, rather than right before sleeping, and to rouse them a little if they do fall asleep eating, before you lay them down.

Comfort & Safety

Two really common concern for many parents of newborns, is how best to know that their baby is safe, comfortable, and not in danger of overheating.

The best way to keep a sleeping infant safe is to ensure that they are on their back to sleep and that there is nothing in their sleeping space but them. Even the tiniest of babies can squirm and kick enough to bring a blanket over their face.

For safety as well as comfort, sleep sacks are highly recommended. Using one eliminates the dangers of loose blankets in the bassinet/crib, and also reassures parents that the baby is warm through the night. You need all the sleep you can get too, so getting up constantly to cover the baby back up isn't ideal.

Overheating can be a worry as well, and luckily sleep sacks are made of many different materials for all seasons. A general rule to follow with regard to being warm/cold is this: whatever is comfortable for hanging out in, plus one layer (i.e. a sleep sack). So, if she was playing all evening in a sleeper, she will be fine for the night in a sleeper, with her sleep sack overtop. If it's particularly cold, use a onesie/undershirt under her sleeper, plus her sleep sack. If she's been comfortable in just a diaper all evening because of hot weather, then a diaper shirt with her sleep sack over top will be just right.

Day & Night Settling

Although you might be tempted to keep things quiet and dark for your newborn to nap well through the day, it might prolong the day/night confusion that almost all newborns will have for up to 6 weeks.

Just think, when he was in his mom's body, her movements lulled him to sleep through the day and when mom was resting, he'd have a party. Once he's finally here, it takes awhile for him to learn he should sleep more at night than during the day.



To help him learn this as his circadian rhythm finishes developing, keep days bright and upbeat and nights, dark and boring; it will help your newborn sort out his days and nights faster.

Make sure to keep night time feeds quiet and dark, and lay them back down afterwards rather than wandering the house or watching television. Avoid diaper changes unless necessary or poopy, and if you do change, keep it completely non stimulating. Keep feeds in his room at night or near there in a chair, rather than in the living room or kitchen, where daytime activities happen. In the morning, make a big deal about it being time to get up for the day by opening blinds, being extra peppy (it's okay if you have to pretend), and having daytime feeds somewhere other than his room.

*Getting these little things in place, should help make those first few months a little smoother for **every-one** and that's a pretty amazing gift to give yourself, and your new precious baby on her birth day.*