

15 BABY SLEEP FACTS NEW PARENTS NEED TO KNOW



The
BABY SLEEP SITE[®]
Helping you and your child sleep

NICOLE JOHNSON
*Founder and Lead Sleep Consultant
of The Baby Sleep Site*

Second Edition

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Introduction

Whether your baby is about to be born, or whether your little one has already entered the world - congratulations! There is nothing as exciting (and overwhelming) as being the mom or dad of a precious new baby.

Speaking of overwhelming - one of the most overwhelming aspects of caring for a newborn baby is making sense of your newborn's sleeping patterns and habits. If you already have a newborn at home, you have probably already figured this out (and if you are still waiting for your little one to arrive, you will figure it out soon) your newborn's sleeping patterns are very, very different from yours. And that can make them hard to understand.

But not to worry! In this free guide, I will outline 15 basic facts about baby sleep that will help you not only understand your newborn's sleeping patterns and habits, but will also prepare you for the changes in sleep that will happen as your baby grows.

And the best part? These facts will help you lay the foundation now for healthy baby sleep habits; that, in turn, will help your baby sleep through the night (when he or she is able) and takes long, restorative naps.

Baby Sleep Fact #1: Babies need a lot of sleep in the first year of life.

Babies need far more sleep than adults. But how much, exactly? Here are some averages, by age:

- **Newborns to 3 month olds:** 10-11 hours at night*, 4-5 hours per day in 4-5 naps (short naps are common)
- **4 to 5 month olds:** 10-12 hours at night*, 2-4 hours per day in 3-4 naps (at least two 1+ hour naps)
- **6 to 8 month olds:** 11-12 hours at night*, 2-3 hours per day in 2-3 naps (two 1+ hour naps and 1 short nap)
- **9 to 12 month olds:** 11-12 hours at night, 2-3 hours per day in 2 naps (1+ hour long)

*Babies will not sleep straight through for this long; these nighttime amounts will be broken up by night feedings. Newborns and young babies will need feedings every 2-3 hours throughout the night, but as your baby grows, the number of night feedings will gradually decrease.

Baby Sleep Fact #2: Young babies (particularly newborns) don't automatically fall asleep when they're tired.

As adults, we are used to drifting off when we become sleepy. But sleep does not work that way for a young baby. As your baby becomes sleepy, she may begin to rub her eyes, or yawn. These are called 'sleep cues' - they are signs that she is tired. This is the window of time in which it is best to put your baby down for a nap, or for the night, because at this point, she will be more likely to fall asleep quickly and easily.

However, that window of time is relatively short. If parents miss it, baby will become more tired, and she will start to fuss. Finally, she will become overly exhausted and start to really wail. Once your baby begins to fuss like this, she is already overtired, and it will be more difficult to get her to relax and fall asleep.

Baby Sleep Fact #3: Keeping a baby awake will not make him sleep better; it will actually make his sleep worse.

This is closely tied to Baby Sleep Fact #2; it is also perhaps the number one most misunderstood fact about baby sleep! And it is easy to see why. As adults, if we want to have a good night's sleep, we may try to stay awake all day, and make sure not to take naps, since that makes it harder for us to sleep soundly at night.

But the opposite is true for our babies. In reality, a baby who is well-rested will sleep better and wake less at night than a baby who is overtired. This is why, in our consultations with families, we rarely advise parents to keep their babies up late at night, in an effort to “make them tired” so that they will sleep well. This simply does not work; the babies become overtired and have a hard time falling asleep and staying asleep.

Instead, we recommend that parents whose babies are not sleeping well try an earlier bedtime. Even though it seems counterintuitive, it often works, since an earlier bedtime helps ward off overtiredness.

Baby Sleep Fact #4: Babies are not born understanding that nighttime is meant for sleeping.

All adults are equipped with 'internal clocks' that tell us when it is time to be awake, and when it is time to go to sleep. Our internal clocks are heavily influenced by sunlight; they are also influenced by hormones. It is our internal clocks that help us feel tired at bedtime and alert in the morning.

But our babies are not born with developed internal clocks. When a baby is in her mom's womb, she relies on her mom's hormones and rhythms to guide her. Outside the womb, it will take some time (up to 2 months) for her own internal clock to develop. During those first 2 months, baby may sleep heavily during the day and then be awake and alert at night. While this is frustrating for new parents, it is all very normal; it's simply a sign that her internal clock is still sorting out daytime and nighttime.

While it can be frustrating to care for your baby when she has her days and nights mixed up, rest assured that the problem will resolve itself over time. There are things you can do, however, to help her sort out her days and nights faster. Make sure to keep her awake for short periods of playtime during the day, and be sure that she gets some exposure to sunlight during the day. (Not direct sunlight, of course - that can cause sunburn!) By contrast, try to keep her room dark at night, and do not incorporate any playtime into her nightly routines.

Baby Sleep Fact #5: Babies need naps in order to thrive and develop properly.

After about age 5, humans stop needing daily naps; for the most part, we are able to get all the sleep we need at night, and stay awake all day. But this is not true for young children - and it is definitely not true for babies!

Naps are not extra, or 'bonus', in the baby stage - naps are necessary. Babies need naps periodically throughout the day in order to grow and develop properly. All babies are different, but here is a rough estimate of baby nap needs, by age:

- From **birth - 3 months**, the number of naps your baby takes will be variable, but will hover around 4-6 naps per day, depending on how long his naps are and how long he can stay up between naps.
- By **3 or 4 months old**, your baby will lean towards just 4 naps, rather than 5.
- From **5 - 8 months**, most babies will have 3 naps per day. There are a few babies who will only have two naps at 6 or 7 months old, but those naps are usually long.
- From **9 - 12 months**, your baby will nap 2 times a day, for an hour or more.

Baby Sleep Fact #6: Swaddling, rocking, and white noise can help newborns and young babies sleep well.

In his popular book, *The Happiest Baby on the Block*, pediatrician Harvey Karp advises parents to treat the first few months of a baby's life as a "4th trimester." During these early months, babies are comforted and soothed by sounds and sensations that re-create the womb.

Swaddling is one technique that helps soothe fussy babies by re-creating the snug feeling they experienced when they were in their mothers' wombs. Swaddling is the simple practice of wrapping a baby up snugly in a blanket. A lightweight, stretchy, 100% cotton blanket is best. Swaddling can help a baby feel secure and relaxed; it can also help babies fall asleep and stay asleep. However, [swaddling is safe only when it's done properly](#); a baby shouldn't be wrapped so tightly that he can't breathe, for example, and a swaddled baby should never be placed face-down to sleep.

Rocking is a fast and easy way to help soothe a crying baby to sleep. Again, rocking re-creates a feeling of being in the womb, since babies are "rocked" almost constantly inside their moms, as mom walks around and goes about her daily activities. This is one reason why infant swings tend to work so well; the rocking motion calms baby and helps her fall asleep quickly. Be advised, however, that a baby shouldn't be left to sleep in the swing for long periods of time, as this can increase the risk of [SIDS](#).

White noise is simply static, background noise (like the sound of a running vacuum cleaner or hair dryer) that helps to mask other sounds. When they are in the womb, babies are surrounded by white noise - the sound of mom's heartbeat, of her blood pumping, etc. So [babies tend to sleep better and longer when white noise is playing in the background](#). White noise machines provide a steady stream of white noise; parents can also download white noise MP3's and [apps](#).

Baby Sleep Fact #7: The age at which a baby can sleep through the night will vary from baby to baby.

Technically, babies are sleeping through the night when they can sleep 5 - 6 hours straight through, with no nighttime feedings. The age at which babies can do this varies: some babies can do this by 2 months of age, while other babies are not able to sleep this long without eating until they are 8 or 9 months old.

While it is normal for a baby to need one night feeding up until 12 months of age, we usually recommend an attempt to wean away from all night feedings around 8 or 9 months of age (oftentimes up to 12 months for a breastfed baby). By that time, babies who are still waking for night feedings are usually doing so out of habit, or because they are not eating enough during the day.

Baby Sleep Fact #8: Baby sleep patterns change permanently around 4 months.

As adults, our sleep is not a constant, unchanging thing; it actually happens in cycles. We cycle between deep and light sleep all night long. During those periods of light sleep, we may actually wake up a little - to readjust our pillow, to roll over, or to stretch. Then, we fall right back to sleep.

When a baby is born, his sleep patterns are different; he has more deep sleep and much less light sleep. At about 4 months of age, however, a baby's sleep patterns will change, and they will become more like ours. As a result, babies may start waking more frequently at night starting around 4 months old, and their naps may become much shorter. We call this the "[4 month sleep regression.](#)"

Baby Sleep Fact #9: Baby sleep needs change due to illness, growth spurts, teething, and developmental milestones.

Think about times in your life when you have been sick. You probably slept more often during your illness, right? This is normal; when our bodies are fighting off infection, we get worn out and need extra rest. The same is true for babies; they need more sleep when they are sick. (Of course, they may also wake more frequently than usual, if pain or other symptoms make them uncomfortable.) Babies will sleep more during [growth spurts](#), too - as with illness, all that growing will make baby extra sleepy.

During developmental milestones, however, when your baby is learning to roll over, crawl, sit, stand, talk, etc., you may find that your baby tends to sleep less than usual, and to wake more frequently. These are [sleep regressions](#), and they tend to happen at the following times (though all babies develop differently!):

- 4 months old
- 8 to 10 months old
- 18 months old
- 2 years old

Teething may also disrupt a baby's sleep. Babies can start teething as early as 3 months of age, although many babies will start a bit later than that. Signs of teething vary, but they can include swollen gums, drooling, and fussiness. Some babies tend to sleep right through the pain and discomfort of teething, but other babies will wake often at night and during naps when they are teething.

Baby Sleep Fact #10: Twenty percent of newborn babies experience colic.

The term colic refers to extended periods of crying -- three or more hours -- that happen three or more times per week, during the first few months of life. Colic happens most often in the late afternoon and evening. (Although it can happen any time of the day.) Colic is often worst when baby is about 2 months of age, and then starts to get better by 3 or 4 months.

Unfortunately, there's no known cause of colic. People have long thought that colic must be caused by digestive problems, like gas and reflux; however, researchers have not been able to define a single cause of colic, despite numerous studies. While colic is definitely frustrating for parents, it is considered a normal part of baby growth and development. Some things to think about or discuss with your baby's doctor, should your baby seem to be high needs or colicky: reflux, dairy sensitivity (to formula or dairy in mom's diet), oversupply (a lactation consultant can help you rule this out), and tongue tie.

It can be hard to soothe a colicky baby. Swaddling and rocking can work well; wearing your baby may help, too. One of the very best ways to comfort a colicky baby, though, is skin-to-skin contact. Undress your baby, and place her directly on your bare chest; this almost always provides instant comfort and reassurance to your baby.

Baby Sleep Fact #11: Room-sharing is recommended through 6 months.

Many parents want to know what the [safest sleeping arrangements](#) are for their babies. First, it is important to remember that babies should always be placed on their backs to sleep - never on their stomachs. And the sleeping surface should be firm, and should not have any loose bedding or “extras” (blankets, stuffed animals, pillows, etc.) on it.

Lots of parents prefer to put their babies in a separate nursery, in a crib. But in the early days and weeks after birth, when babies are up every few hours to eat, it can feel impractical to have your baby in a separate room of the house. It is more convenient to have your baby close at hand, in your bedroom. Many parents like to place a bassinet right next to the bed; this way, baby has a separate place to sleep, but is still close to mom and dad. There are even bassinets that fit right up against your bed. This makes it much easier to care for the baby during the night. This sleeping arrangement is considered very safe; in fact, the AAP recommends room-sharing as the safest and best sleeping arrangement for infants.

Baby Sleep Fact #12: Having predictable, daily routines in place can help babies sleep.

Before 6 months of age, babies are not ready for by-the-clock schedules. However, even newborns and young babies can benefit from predictable routines. When you create a routine for your baby, you are creating a predictable pattern of events surrounding a certain activity, or set of activities. Routines help babies understand what events are coming next; a bedtime routine, for instance, signals to baby that bedtime is approaching, and that it's time to wind down.

A great routine for young babies is the Eat-Play-Sleep routine. The routine looks something like this:

- **EAT** - When baby wakes up from a nap, he breastfeeds or drinks a bottle of formula.
- **PLAY*** - After eating, baby stays awake for a bit of “play time.” This can include reading books, handling safe toys, having a bath, tummy time, etc. This play time should be short for newborns (no more than half an hour), but it will become longer as baby grows.
- **SLEEP** - After baby has played for a bit, she should go back to bed for her next nap.

*Playtime should only happen during the day. Babies should go right back to bed after each nighttime feeding. This will ensure that baby falls asleep quickly after night feeds.

Baby Sleep Fact #13: Dream feeding works for some families, but not for others.

Since some babies will not sleep through the night without a feeding until sometime after 9 months (or perhaps longer), some parents swear by something called a “dream feed.” Dream feeding means that you feed your baby while he is still asleep, before you go off to bed. The theory is that you will get a longer stretch of sleep yourself, and that your baby will get the nourishment he needs without waking up.

For some people, a dream feed will be a Godsend. For instance, if your baby goes to sleep around 7 p.m., you dream feed around 10 p.m. (before you go to bed), and then baby might sleep until 3 or 4 a.m. (or even later), giving you a glorious 6 to 8 straight hours of sleep. When it works like this, a dream feed is a wonderful thing.

Unfortunately, dream feeding doesn't always work. For one thing, it might be very difficult to rouse your baby enough to feed him any old time you want to. Some babies will awaken just enough to eat and stay asleep, but others might not wake up enough to eat. On the other hand, some babies will wake up too much and be somewhat cranky that you woke them up (especially if they aren't hungry)! What's more, even if you can successfully dream feed your baby, she might still wake up at 11 p.m. (or whenever). In this case, she is probably waking out of habit, or during the transition between sleep cycles, and not because she needs to eat.

Baby Sleep Fact #14: Babies can quickly form bad sleeping habits.

The things we do to help our babies fall asleep (rocking them, offering a pacifier, nursing them to sleep, etc.) can be real lifesavers in the early days and weeks after birth. However, your baby can quickly become dependent on these - they can become habits. We call them "sleep associations."

Basically, it works like this: if you consistently rock your baby to sleep, your baby will come to associate being rocked with falling asleep. Then, when your baby wakes at night (between sleep cycles once she's ~3 to 4 months old), or during nap time, she will need you to come and rock her back to sleep, since she does not know how to fall asleep on her own, without being rocked. Sleep props are fine as long as they result in peaceful sleep, but they can become problems when the baby wakes every 45 minutes to 2 hours to make sure his sleep props are in place.

Baby Sleep Fact #15: You can teach your newborn to fall asleep independently using gentle techniques.

There are simple, gentle techniques you can try with a newborn or young baby to help prevent sleep associations, and to help your baby learn to fall asleep on his own.

One good technique is to lay your baby down drowsy, but awake, at least half the time. If your baby is drowsy but awake, he'll be calm and content, but his eyes will be at least partially open. The idea behind this is that if your baby is aware that he's falling asleep in the crib, on his own, that will be a good first step towards helping him learn to fall asleep independently. However, do not expect your baby to fall asleep independently regularly in the first few months of life; many babies are not ready to learn this skill until they are at least 4 months old.

If your baby routinely falls asleep while feeding, you can slightly rouse him by gently stroking his cheeks, by talking to him, or maybe by changing his diaper. This will rouse him just enough to be drowsy but not fully asleep.

Thank you for reading *15 Essential Baby Sleep Facts for New Parents!* While this guide is not meant to be a comprehensive book about newborn and baby care, it is my hope that the information presented here will help you better understand your baby's sleeping patterns, and that these facts will give your whole family the tools you need for a lifetime of healthy sleep habits.

Additional Support

Not all babies respond as quickly as others, so as part of The Baby Sleep Site® community, I invite you to take advantage of:

- For both new parents and parents who are expecting again, *Essential Keys to Your Newborn's Sleep* is a practical, hands-on e-Book with tips about how you can influence some of the factors that affect a newborn's sleep and for setting the stage for better sleep, both now and throughout the first year. <https://babysleepsite.com/newborn-essential-keys>
- For those persistent nighttime struggles, *The 3-Step System to Help Your Baby Sleep*, is a comprehensive e-Book that allows you to bypass the lengthy books currently on the market and start getting your child to sleep today. <https://www.babysleepsite.com/3-step-system/>
- *Mastering Naps and Schedules*, a comprehensive guide to napping routines, nap transitions, and all the other important “how-tos” of good baby sleep. With over 40 sample sleep schedules and planning worksheets, *Mastering Naps and Schedules* is a hands-on tool ideal for any parenting style. <https://www.babysleepsite.com/mastering-naps/>
- With *The 5-Step System to Better Toddler Sleep*, get back in control with this comprehensive toddler sleep guide. Toolkit of strategies, sample schedules, and sleep logs will put your toddler on the right sleep track. <https://www.babysleepsite.com/5-step-system-toddler/>
- For personalized advice and support for your unique situation, at an affordable price, consider our sleep consulting services (<https://www.babysleepsite.com/services>). Read parent stories (<https://www.babysleepsite.com/testimonials>) and our FAQ (<https://www.babysleepsite.com/sleep-helpdesk-faq/>).
- Join our *VIP Members Area* packed with premium content and resources: e-Books, assessments, detailed case studies, expert support, and more. **Costs less to join than buying products separately!** (<https://www.babysleepsite.com/diy/>)
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About The Baby Sleep Site®



The Baby Sleep Site® (<https://www.babysleepsite.com>) specializes in baby sleep products and consulting services. The company was founded by Nicole Johnson - sleep coach, wife, and the mother of two boys. With a B.A. degree from UC Berkeley and an MBA from Ohio State University, Nicole also received an honorary degree in “Surviving Sleep Deprivation,” thanks to her son’s “no sleep” curriculum. She became an expert on infant and toddler sleep and made it her mission to help other parents solve their sleep problems, too. All sleep consultants, aside from Nicole, are carefully chosen with their diverse backgrounds in mind. They go through extensive training to learn the strategies and philosophies of The Baby Sleep Site in order to provide you with a knowledgeable, thoughtful, supportive, and consistent experience no matter where you are in your journey to better sleep.

If you have any questions or comments on this guide, please e-mail us!: contact@babysleepsite.com.

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