



NEWBORN SLEEP BASICS

THE PARENT PLAYBOOK

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FOSTERING HEALTHY SLEEP HABITS

Parents of newborns often think there's nothing that can be done about sleep at this age but spoiler alert: newborns (ages 0-3 months old) are very open to sleep changes.

With consistent effort, it's absolutely possible to establish good sleep habits for life, and when parents invest in establishing these habits from day one, formal 'sleep training' is often not even needed.





1. FOLLOW AGE-APPROPRIATE WAKE WINDOWS

- Learning your child's age-appropriate wake windows can mean the difference between a well-rested baby that falls asleep with ease and one that's fussing, upset, and seems to *dislike* sleep.
- A wake window is the amount of time your little one can handle being awake in one stretch. "Sleepy cues" (e.g., yawning) are often unreliable and sometimes mean baby is already overtired.
- So, how much awake time can your little one handle?
 - When a baby is first born, they can handle about 45 minutes.
 - At 2 months old, this increases to around 1-1.25 hours.
 - At 3 months old, this increases to around 1-1.5 hours.
- Refer to our detailed wake window and schedule documents on the site to help you figure out the age-appropriate wake windows for your little one.
- Do whatever you can (safely) to assist baby to get to sleep, and stay asleep, for naps. Don't worry about bassinet or crib naps just yet. Not until you've nailed these healthy habits, and have made good progress with nighttime independence (see below).



2. CREATE A SLEEP-CONDUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT

- A perfectly sleep-conducive environment includes a dark and cool room (between 20-21 degrees Celsius, or 68-70 degrees Fahrenheit), with continuous white/pink noise running, and a minimalist look to the area in and around your little one's bed.
- After a baby's day/night confusion has resolved, typically by about 2 months of age, use room-darkening shades or blinds – or whatever you have on hand (e.g., garbage bags, towels etc.) – for all naps (the ones they're taking in a bassinet or crib) and nighttime sleep.
- This helps to support the production of melatonin, the sleepy hormone, helping your baby to fall asleep and stay asleep more easily.
- Babies sleep more soundly if the area around their crib/bassinet/cradle is fairly minimalist, meaning the sleep space is decluttered and free from mobiles, toys and distracting piles of 'stuff' nearby.
- The continuous use of white noise helps to block out any noise annoyances and also helps your little one transition more smoothly between their sleep-wake cycles.
- You can begin with baby in either a bassinet or crib. Once a baby is pushing up or showing signs of rolling, they should be moved out of the bassinet into the crib.
- Swaddling should be discontinued by 8 weeks old, or at first signs of rolling, whichever comes first.



3. IMPLEMENT A BEDTIME ROUTINE

- What's in a bedtime routine? Quite a bit. A routine can help your baby understand what's expected next...sleep!
- At about 2 months old, a great bedtime routine lasts about 5-10 minutes and at 3+ months old, it's around 20-30 minutes.
- The routine includes calming activities done in approximately the same order every night.
- It's okay to mix up your routine to include/exclude a bath but try to keep the rest of the routine as consistent as possible from day to day.
- Here's a sample bedtime routine:
 - Wash up
 - PJs
 - Massage
 - Bedtime Books and/or Songs
 - Sleep phrase (e.g., It's time for sleep, sweetie)
 - Snuggles and into bed
- You can create whatever routine works best for your family, but please make sure you have one. It's incredibly important for helping to support your little one's smooth transition into sleep.



4. WORK TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

- During the newborn stage, you may be helping your baby to fall asleep by bouncing or rocking them in your arms or by cuddling or feeding them to sleep.
- Once you've established the previous three sleep habits, however, consider moving your little one gently toward more independent sleep.
- What does this mean? For example, if you are currently bouncing your baby to sleep on an exercise ball, try to first bounce less vigorously, and then progress to just sitting on the ball, then just holding your baby to sleep, and so on.
- In the newborn stage, this is a gentle, gradual progression towards your little one being able to fall asleep on their own. You can easily adapt this strategy to wherever you are right now with your little one's sleep.
- Check out the "Fade It Out" sleep coaching methods on the site for approaches you can take with the tiniest ones! They are all appropriate for the newborn stage.
- Establishing independence early on will help you avoid the big sleep disruption that tends to happen at around the 3-4 month mark, when the sleep-wake cycle maturation process is at its peak. It also means you can avoid formal 'sleep training' since your baby already knows how to sleep independently. Bonus!



TIPS FOR WITCHING HOUR

- The witching hour (really: hours) is a time of day that newborn parents dread.
- What is the witching hour?
 - This is a period of increased wakefulness, fussiness, or crying in the later part of the day. It can start anywhere from 3 p.m., and some families can deal with this for hours into the night.
- Why does witching hour happen?
 - From a sleep perspective, the witching hour happens when your baby has not had good rest during the day. Either you've stretched baby to stay awake for too long, or they haven't gotten the total amount of sleep that they need.
 - In the late afternoon and evening, it usually feels like fighting an uphill battle to get your little one to sleep in their own space. This is because your baby's homeostatic sleep pressure (their drive to sleep) is very low in the afternoons. (It's best to just hold baby to sleep in this case.)
 - Feeding issues can also contribute to this increased fussy period. If baby seems to be constantly hungry, you want to make sure they are feeding properly and getting a full tummy each time.



TIPS FOR WITCHING HOUR

- Why does witching hour happen?
 - Another possibility is that your child may have reflux which can cause more physical discomfort in the later part of the day, particularly after continuous feedings. Definitely check in with your little one's doctor if you suspect feeding difficulties may play a role in your baby's evening behaviors.

There are several ways you can cope with witching hour.

1. Try to get yourself some support during this time. It's helpful to 'change hands' with a partner or caregiver, especially when the crying reaches extremes. You'll be better able to regulate yourself and stay calm during the witching hour if you don't have to manage this all on your own.
2. Get out for a walk with your baby. Use a carrier or wrap. They may even fall asleep.
3. A white noise machine, used at a safe distance from baby (to avoid hearing issues associated with noise machines being played too closely or too loudly), is also a good calming distraction.
4. Try some skin to skin contact with your baby in a dark quiet room. Take some nice deep breaths while you hold them. It will help you calm down and soon they will too.
5. If all else fails, try this triple whammy comforting technique: Swaddle baby snugly; hold them snugly against you; give them something to suck on (pacifier, clean finger, nipple!); and, use vigorous movements to calm them.