



## Help for young babies with sleeping problems (3-12 months)

Young babies need a lot of sleep, but their sleep patterns change and every baby is different. On average a baby will sleep for 16-18 hours a day in the first 4 months and from 12-16 hours in the first year but of course they will get hungry and wake every few hours for a feed or a nappy change. Going without sleep is one of the biggest challenges for a parent and establishing a sleep routine isn't always easy.

### What is sleep?

Sleep is divided into two different states which alternate through the night: Dream Sleep sometimes referred to as REM (rapid eye movement) and Deep Sleep. As we pass from one state to the other, we often wake, roll over and go back to sleep, totally unaware that we have woken at all. This is because we have sleep clues – dark room, comfy bed, etc. A baby needs to 'learn' his sleep clues. If these sleep clues are being breastfed, rocked to sleep or a dummy, he will need these clues again when he wakes at night. You can teach him new clues which will enable him to fall asleep on his own.

### Establishing a routine

Between the ages of three and six months, a routine should start to emerge; ideally your baby will sleep more at night than during the day. Do not worry if this is not the case. Note down the feed and sleep times to see if there is a pattern emerging. Try to establish a bedtime routine as soon as possible, keeping to the same bedtime, and perhaps a warm bath followed by a quiet feed and a cuddle.

### Checklist for settling babies (3 – 6 months)

- Put baby down on his back awake, allowing him to try and settle down himself. Do not go back at the first whimper. It is worth noting that young babies may need to cry for a short period to get themselves to sleep.
- Young babies will often wake for a night feed; this is natural. However, try to keep feeds as low key as possible, (no loud noises, subdued lighting). This will help baby

distinguish between day and night and will hopefully prevent night feeds from becoming a comfortable habit as he gets older.

- Make sure that baby is comfortable (check nappy), well fed and not thirsty.
- Is baby cold or in a draught?
- Is baby too hot? It is very important not to allow baby to get overheated.
- Some babies like the dark; others prefer a soft night light. Some babies like background noise. There are many apps available offering white noise.
- Soothing quiet music can often help babies to settle; try a musical mobile over the cot, attached securely and safely out of reach.

## Sleep routines

Sleep training is not for everyone but due to individual family circumstances, some parents feel it may be best for them and their baby.

Sleep training can be hard to carry out but with patience can be successful.

## Checking routine for older babies (7 -9 months onwards)

This method, advocated by numerous child psychologists, has worked for many parents who have contacted the Cry-sis Helpline. It can also be used for the older child.

- Ensure that parents and baby are both well. Give yourself 2 clear weeks when you are not going out in the evening or going away.
- Babies and children benefit from a routine, especially at bedtime. Set a bedtime and stick to it. Make sure there is a good 'winding down' period: quiet games, stories and a relaxing bath. Televisions and screens that emit a blue light can cause wakefulness and hinder sleep.
- Put baby to bed awake, tuck them in, say 'goodnight' and leave the room. Make sure baby has their usual comfort item, such as a dummy with them before you go, and there is no access to blue screens in the bedroom.
- When baby cries, leave them for a set time, (3-5 mins perhaps), then go back, 'check', tuck baby back in and leave. Try not to pick baby up. Do this until baby goes to sleep; some parents leave the period of time between checking a little longer each time.
- If your baby gets up, return them gently but firmly to bed. It may help to use the same repetitive phrase and tone of voice every time you go in to 'check' your child
- Be consistent. If you change the routine it could make it more difficult to carry on with the routine the following night.
- If baby wakes in the night, do the same as before. Go back as many times as is necessary to 'check'. In this way, you and baby know that everything is OK. Keep the light level low and use as little disturbance as possible.
- If you have the support of a partner, make sure you work together, and do the same things.
- Tell your neighbours what you are going to do if you think the crying may alarm them and discuss it with the health visitor.

## The Gradual Retreat Method

This is probably easier on the nerves than the checking routine as it may involve less crying, but may take longer. Baby is put down to bed awake again, but this time, instead of leaving, you stay and sit by the cot or bed until baby falls asleep – stroking them as necessary but avoiding talking to them. Over the next few nights, gradually sit further away until baby will fall asleep with you outside the bedroom door. Do not use a phone etc near the cot while you are waiting for baby to go to sleep, the blue light will hinder sleep.

### Points to remember:

- Consult your GP or health visitor to eliminate any medical conditions that may account for sleep problems and discuss the new routine.
- Consistency is vital. Baby will understand that this is different, and if repeated every time they wake up, they will become accustomed to the routine and will eventually fall asleep. Sleep training does take patience, and it is unlikely to be successful in the first one or two days. There will be a nightly improvement, it is useful to keep a diary of progress, be prepared for some difficult nights before a good sleep pattern is established.
- If the baby becomes ill, sleep patterns will obviously be disturbed, try and get back to the previous routine as soon as baby is well again.
- An over tired baby will often sleep less soundly; always ensure your baby has adequate day-time naps.
- Obtain as much support from others as you can.
- Look after yourself (baby relies on you to stay fit). Eat well and drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated. (Especially important when breast feeding).

The following section written by Prof Ian St.James Roberts, a patron of Cry-sis, gives detailed information and advice on sleep problems, together with references for further reading: [www.cry-sis.org.uk/help-with-older-babies-guide](http://www.cry-sis.org.uk/help-with-older-babies-guide)

You can contact the  
**CRY-SIS HELPLINE**  
**08451 228 669**

Lines Open 7 Days a Week 9am – 10pm

2p per minute plus the standard network charge

On dialling the Cry-sis Helpline you will be connected to a volunteer who once experienced problems like yours. The helpline is open seven days a week between 9am and 10pm, but please remember that the volunteer is a parent, just like you, with family commitments.