



Children's  
Sleep Clinic

# newborn sleep guide

YOUR FREE E-BOOK



# introduction



Welcome to Parenthood – and to the World of Newborn Sleep

Congratulations on the arrival of your baby and the beginning of this extraordinary journey into parenthood. As you settle into life with your newborn, one topic is likely to dominate your thoughts—and your conversations—more than any other: sleep.

This guide is here to support you through the early weeks. It's your companion for understanding your baby's unique sleep patterns, creating a calming sleep environment, and laying the foundations for healthy sleep habits.

We'll gently unpack the science behind newborn sleep so you can make informed, confident choices that work for your family. You'll find realistic expectations, expert insights, and reassuring advice to help you navigate this new world with clarity—not confusion.

It's completely normal to feel overwhelmed by sleep deprivation. In fact, studies show that poor sleep quality in the early weeks can increase the risk of postpartum depression. It's no wonder that sleep becomes such a central concern for new parents. How often have you been asked, "Is she sleeping through the night yet?"—as though this is the ultimate benchmark of success.

But the real key to coping—and even thriving—during this time lies in understanding what's normal for newborn sleep. While most parents know that sleep looks different for babies, few are told how and why. This guide aims to change that—so you can stop worrying about what your baby "should" be doing, and start focusing on what they need.







## Newborn to 4-month-old baby's sleep


It's our internal 24-hour body clock, or circadian rhythm, which tells us when to sleep, when to wake and when to eat. Our brain uses light in the day to reset its body clock and at night it is darkness that helps our body know it's time for sleep.

In the dark environment of the uterus your baby does not have light to help signal the difference between night and day. Before birth it is your movement and melatonin, which your baby receives via the placenta that helps to regulate your unborn baby's sleep.

More recent research has shown for the majority of a pregnancy babies are asleep and it is not until the last trimester that they have some brief periods of two or three hours per day, awake.

But at the moment of birth everything changes; babies are suddenly cut off from their mothers' intimate physiological signals so now they must begin to generate both their own body clock and start their own hormone production. Newborns are usually very sleepy in the first few days after birth. Babies born before their due dates have some extra days of sleepiness, while those born after their due dates may skip that super-sleepy stage entirely.

Initially your newborn will have about 3 days' supply of melatonin that comes via your placenta. This could be nature's clever way of helping you recovery from the delivery and to give time for your breast milk to come in. After these first 3 days the next time your baby's own melatonin is produced to a level that impacts their sleep is around 3 to 4 months old.





# help my baby to sleep

Your newborn baby will spend an average of 16-17 hours a day asleep – with their sleep being split roughly 50:50 between the day and night.

Life would be very simple if this came in one big chunk, but of course that's not the case; their sleep is governed by their need to wake frequently to feed and for comfort and so their sleep episodes are be brief.

At this age your baby's sleep will be split into many periods of two or three hours (or even less), that's scattered throughout your own sleeping and waking times.

This unpredictable pattern happens because your baby's circadian rhythm is yet to develop and they are unable to distinguish night from day; until then their nights and days will simply blend together.







Your young baby may only be happily awake for short periods of 45 to 60 minutes at a time before needing to sleep again.

To help prevent them from becoming over tired and harder to settle it is best to use a combination of timings, based on when the baby wakes, and sleep cues.

Often the very first sign your baby needs sleep is when they become quiet and still after a period of wakefulness.

This is the time for you to reduce stimulation and start settling your baby to sleep. Some babies can be very subtle in their cues meaning it can be easy to miss their first signs of tiredness. Your baby may then move on to yawning, to crying and become fractious and hard to settle.

You will often find your baby falls asleep more easily if you are able to respond to those early sleep cues.



# What can you do in the early weeks to help you baby's sleep?



For the majority of human history we've been hunter gatherers, living closely with nature and living outdoors. We carried our babies as we foraged and worked so they were exposed to lots of daylight, and plenty of daytime social activity – important zeitgebers to get the body clock on track. But now in our modern world infants spend most of their lives indoors with artificial light and are less likely to be so included in, the routine activities of other family members.

So how can we as modern-day parents help our newborns adjust to a world with light and dark and assist baby's developing body clock to concentrate their sleep into the night?

The good news is there are some simple tried and tested tips that will help.







# day vs night

Expose newborns to natural lighting patterns

In the day:

Studies have found young babies tended to sleep longer at night if they had been exposed to lots of early afternoon light. And time spent outdoors might make an important difference. Babies who go outside experience much higher daytime light levels than those kept indoors all day, and may develop stronger circadian rhythms as a result.

When parents put their baby in their Moses basket or crib for their daytime nap, leave the curtains open and do not try to minimise noise. Light penetrates closed eyelids, so it's possible napping in a darkened room could confuse baby's body clock, sending the message that it's actually night time.

Include your baby in the hustle and bustle of the day and when they're awake interact, talk and sing to them. Research suggests daily social interactions can have a positive impact on circadian rhythms. When parents included their newborns in their daily activities, these babies seemed to adapt more quickly to the 24-hour day. One study took continuous measurements of mother-infant activity patterns for four months after birth. Newborns who were active at the same time of day as their mothers were quicker to develop mature circadian rhythms.



# day vs night

## At Night:

In contrast at night, keep the bedroom dark at night and during night feeds, keeping voices low and eye contact minimal to avoid over stimulating them; only change nappies if it is really necessary. Too much social stimulation at night can send the message that it's time to be awake and engaged. The goal is to keep the baby in a drowsy state, making it easier for them to fall back to sleep.

To help optimise your sleep, its best to base your very young baby's bedtime close to yours. Putting your very young baby to bed too early may mean a very early morning start for you. But as the balance of your baby's sleep alters and they sleep less in the day and more overnight, their bedtime will slowly shift earlier until they reach 3 to 4 months old and can have a regular evening bedtime.

You will soon see even by 4 weeks your baby is sleeping a little longer during the night and a little less in the day.

By the age of eight to ten weeks most babies can distinguish night from day, a stage of development that parents greet with great relief.





# ZZZ Newborn Sleep Cycles

In the first few months your baby's sleep cycles in the day will be about 30 minutes long and at night they are about 60 minutes long. This means they will stir and potentially wake after very short periods of sleep.

You may not realise your baby who wakes in the day after 30 minutes and at night after 60 mins has actually had a full sleep cycle.

## Newborn sleep stages:

Young babies sleep also looks very different in their first six months; they do not experience the different stages of sleep as older babies, children and adults do. Instead, they experience active sleep (our rapid-eye movement, REM), and quiet sleep (our non-rapid-eye movement, NREM) and indeterminate sleep (which combines features of REM and of non-REM).



### Active Sleep:

Because of its developmental importance, young babies spend a lot of time in REM sleep; in-fact your unborn baby spends almost all of their time in this sleep-like state.

REM sleep is thought to be vital for promoting brain maturation and the growth of neural pathways within a baby's developing brain and accounts for 50 to 70 per cent of a newborn's sleep state. As babies grow their sleep cycles alter and they spend less time in REM sleep.

During REM sleep you will often see your baby move, twitch, jerk, their eyes move about under closed eyelids, their breathing speed up, and mouth move. At times you may even think your baby is awake, but if just observed for a few moments, they may settle naturally back into quiet sleep; rather than fully waking.

Research suggests that REM serves a special function for young infants. And biologists think that young infants might need all that muscle-twitching to help develop crucial motor circuits in the brain. In effect, newborns may be testing the “wiring” — discovering how different parts of the brain are connected with body movements and sensations.

All that physical activity can jolt babies awake, which is probably why newborns experience such a high rate of arousals during REM or active sleep.







### Quiet Sleep:

This is a state of slow wave sleep, during which blood is released to the muscles, tissue is grown or repaired, and hormones are released for growth and development. Your baby will lie peacefully quietly, no eye movement, their muscles will be relaxed, their breathing will be deep and steady and there is little movement.

This is the state most of us think of as true sleep. It usually only lasts about 20 minutes. It's thought spending long stretches of time in quiet sleep could be risky. Which is why the typical 60-minute newborn sleep cycle includes only about 20 minutes of quiet sleep.

### Indeterminate sleep:

This sleep combines features of REM and of non-REM. Your baby may move around or vocalise during this sleep.





It might look complicated, but we can sum it up in a simple way.

Other than about 20 minutes of Quiet sleep newborns are very active during their sleep. They will often jerk, sigh, or vocalise during partial arousals. This can lead exhausted parents to think their baby is actually awake.

To avoid this, it's best for you to wait and observe your baby for a few moments before picking them up, especially at night, because your baby may simply be transitioning through stages of active sleep and if simply observed may quickly transition back into quieter sleep.





# How much sleep do babies need?

A question asked by pretty much every parent. It's a surprisingly difficult question to answer, especially for younger babies as there is just not enough research it as yet.





What do we know:

Baby sleep patterns are shaped by a mix of genetic, emotional and environmental factors

Studies have shown some babies need less sleep than others, and that specific aspects of sleep — like how easily an infant is awakened — are shaped by genes.

Another suggestion is infant temperament. If a baby tends to be less adaptable and more irritable, it's harder to quiet them down, and studies confirm that such babies tend to sleep less overall.

Other theories point to brain activity during sleep stages, suggesting some people are able to sleep more efficiently than others. And recent research confirms that genes for chronotype can affect baby sleep patterns- owl chronotype babies falling asleep later at night than lark type babies.

But it's clear that parents can affect their baby sleep patterns.

# Average Number of Hours Sleep Needed

AGE	Average Number of Hours Sleep Needed		
	Day	Night	Total Over 24 Hours
1 week	8-9	8-9	16-18
4 weeks	6-8	8-9	14-17
3 months	5-6	9-11	14-17





# Sleep Changes as your baby gets older



From 3/4 months:

By now your baby's own melatonin production helps their sleep, and day-and-night rhythms are in place. Melatonin is now influencing their maturing sleep patterns and they now enter into deep sleep at the start of the night; a pattern they will follow for life.

Babies are now able to recognise cues from you and understand what is happening, so if you haven't already done so this is the perfect time to introduce a bedtime routine.

By three months babies are sleeping much more at night than in the day, on average 9 to 11 hours at night and around 5 to 6 hours in the day. And night-time sleep is in longer chunks; studies show that about 50% of babies of this age can sleep for five or six hours at a time at night.

Night-time sleep cycles are slowly starting to extend to 90 minutes and daytime sleep cycles increase to 45 minutes, however for some babies this is not fully established until a year old.

# Encourage good sleep habits

How can you encourage good sleep habits:

One of the most effective ways you can help your baby develop good sleep habits and sleep well is to establish a nightly bedtime routine.

It eases your baby's body and brain through the transition from the fun and excitement of daytime activities into the preparation for a good night's sleep.

It's the foundation of good sleep has been clinically proven to promote healthy sleep, earlier bedtimes, less time to fall asleep, longer sleep duration and less night wakings.

A bedtime routine can also help the dreaded sleep regressions. These can happen at any point throughout the first year and beyond and are normal. Having a bedtime routine in place offers the comfort that can you're your baby get through these phases



## The Power of a Bedtime Routine

The benefits of a simple bedtime routine are far-reaching—not just in the early weeks and months, but well into childhood and beyond. Research shows that when families introduce a regular bedtime routine as early as three months, it can have a lasting positive impact on a child's sleep.

In fact, studies have found a dose-dependent relationship: the more frequently and consistently the routine is followed, the better the sleep outcomes—particularly as children reach preschool age.

But the impact of a bedtime routine goes far beyond sleep. A nightly wind-down ritual plays a powerful role in supporting a child's overall development and wellbeing. The nurturing moments shared during a bedtime routine can help foster early language skills, emotional regulation, and positive behaviour.



At its heart, a bedtime routine is a daily opportunity to connect. It's a gentle, predictable end to the day—a time for bonding, calm, and comfort. These few precious minutes each evening can support healthy brain development, reduce stress, strengthen parent-child attachment, and contribute to smoother family life overall.



## There's no Rush

You should not feel under pressure to start a bedtime routine as soon as you get home from the hospital with your new born baby. You, your partner and your baby need time to recover from the delivery, time to get to know each other and time to establish feeding.

The first few weeks with your newborn will go by in a blur of feeding, changing nappies and sleeping. And if your baby always falls asleep in your arms while feeding, that's fine, that's what babies do and you are not going to create "bad habits". You should do what works best for you and your baby so you all get the rest, sleep and nutrition you need.

As you gain confidence and get to know your baby's habits and understand their tired cues more (see page 28 for sleep cues) , you may decide now is the time to consider introducing a simple bedtime routine. Start with something very short and simple. Some quiet cuddle time in dim light; you may wish to offer your baby their pre bath feed at this time.

This has the advantages that your baby won't be tired and hungry while you're are getting them ready for bed and your baby will also have had time for wind to disperse meaning they will be more comfortable at bedtime.



Having this earlier feed also means your baby is less likely to fall asleep feeding just before bed and can be put down slightly awake. This is also especially helpful if your baby is very windy or suffers with from digestive issues such as reflux.

Then take them for a calm and relaxing warm bath or a top and tail and a calming massage.

Research has shown newborns who had a nightly massage as the last step of their bedtime routine, after one month had less bedtime resistance, fell asleep faster and mothers reported fewer night wakings and longer periods of night-time sleep.

Next dress baby into their night clothes and sleeping bag and have a cuddly top up feed. You may finish the routine reading a little book or singing your baby's favourite trigger lullaby and lastly soothing them to sleep with some gentle rocking, patting and the sound of your voice.

#### Sleepy but awake;

You may have heard it's best to put your baby down when they are drowsy, not asleep, so that your baby learns to put themselves to sleep. In reality this can be very difficult to achieve, but if you see the chance to do so, try it. Once your baby is relaxed and drowsy on their mattress you could try patting and shushing them to sleep. If this doesn't work, that's fine, try again the next time you see the opportunity. Over time your baby will slowly get used to falling asleep in their crib or cot.





# Creating a Bedtime Routine from 3 to 4 Months Onwards

In my very many years of working with babies and children's sleep, I've rarely seen a bedtime routine that didn't need a little fine-tuning. The truth is, it's the combination of all the small steps that makes the biggest difference.

Each part of the routine plays a role in helping your baby's busy brain and body gradually wind down for sleep. Without this gentle transition, getting your little one to settle can become a real challenge—often leading parents to rely on rocking, bouncing, or even late-night car rides to get their baby to sleep.

Establishing a consistent and calming bedtime routine from around 3 to 4 months is one of the most effective ways to support better sleep—for your baby and for you.





As your baby gets a little older, their sleep patterns will start to mature and they will start to produce their own melatonin.

They will become skilled at recognising cues from you and understand that the start of their bedtime routine means sleep is coming. So, if you haven't already done so, this is a great age to start a bedtime routine for your baby.

Most babies will now be sleeping on average 9-11 hours at night and around 5 to 6 hours in the day. So, you can plan the start of your little ones bedtime routine based around a much earlier bed time now.

To help keep your baby's body clock regulated aim to start the routine at about the same time every evening when your baby or toddler is sleepy, but not overtired. By now you will probably be tuned into your baby's sleep cues and recognise those early signs of tiredness.





Creating a bedtime routine for your baby takes commitment and consistency, so it's important to choose something simple and soothing that works for you as a family. When both you and your partner are on board and feel confident in the routine, it's much easier to stick with it night after night.

Babies thrive on routine. Predictable, loving patterns help them feel safe and secure, especially at the end of a long and stimulating day. A consistent bedtime routine also sets up strong sleep cues—your baby's brain will begin to recognise that these familiar steps mean it's time to wind down and go to sleep.

The routine doesn't need to be long. In fact, keeping it brief and focused helps your baby stay calm and avoid becoming overstimulated. Around 30 minutes is usually perfect—45 minutes at most.

Try to keep everything centred around the bathroom and bedroom. Once you've started the bedtime wind-down, it's best not to return to busy areas like the kitchen or playroom. This could send a confusing message that it's time to play again, triggering a “second wind” just when your baby was beginning to settle.





By repeating the same three or four steps in the same order each evening, your baby will begin to understand that sleep is coming. Even by 12 weeks of age, babies can recognise these simple patterns as cues that it's bedtime.

Start thinking about bedtime about an hour before you want your baby to be asleep. This gives you time to gently shift from daytime activity to a more restful, sleepy state.

Begin by tidying away toys and avoiding lively or energetic play. Even if your baby is showing signs of tiredness, too much stimulation can reset their alertness and make it harder to fall asleep.

Instead, focus on gentle connection—dim the lights, reduce household noise, and spend 10 to 15 minutes on calm, cuddly activities. A soft lullaby, a quiet story, or simply holding your baby and talking softly are all perfect ways to ease into bedtime.

Creating this nurturing space, night after night, helps your baby learn that bedtime is a safe, predictable, and loving part of their day. Over time, these early routines become powerful tools for supporting healthy sleep—not just now, but as your baby grows.





## Creating a Calm Sleep Environment

Babies, just like adults, sleep better in the right environment. You can help your baby wind down and prepare for sleep by creating a space that feels calm, safe, and a little like a cosy cave.

### Bathroom setting

Keep the bathroom lighting low and calming as part of your baby's wind-down routine. Many modern bathrooms are very bright, which can signal to your baby's body that it's still daytime and suppress melatonin. Try using softer lighting options like a mirror light, LED battery candles, natural evening light from a window to create a sleep-friendly atmosphere.

### Bedroom setup.

Use a small night light in warm amber or orange tones is best. These colours are less likely to interfere with your baby's sleep. Make sure the room is comfortably cool—between 18–20°C is ideal. You can check your baby's temperature by feeling the back of their neck or chest (hands and feet often feel cooler and aren't the best guide).

### Bedtime milk

If your baby usually has milk as part of their bedtime routine, this can be a lovely time to offer a feed. Not only does it help them settle more comfortably, especially if they've experienced reflux or tummy troubles, but it also gives you a chance to gently separate feeding from falling asleep. Over time, you may choose to move the milk feed to earlier in the routine to support independent sleep skills.



### A gentle bath to wind down.

Give your baby a short, warm bath in a dimly lit bathroom.

Keep bath time quiet and relaxing—think of it as a mini spa rather than playtime. A bath of just 5 to 10 minutes is plenty. This helps your baby stay relaxed and prevents overstimulation. Plus, the natural drop in body temperature afterwards can gently boost melatonin levels and support the transition into sleep.

### Continue into the bedroom.

Move straight from the bathroom into your baby's softly lit bedroom. If your little one enjoys it and doesn't become overstimulated, a calming massage can be a lovely addition to the routine. Then, dress your baby for bed and offer a final top-up feed if needed.

### Wind-down activities.

Read one or two quiet storybooks—choose calm, simple stories and avoid books with flaps or sounds at this time. These final moments help your baby gently settle, while also offering lovely bonding time.

About 15 minutes before you'd like your baby to be asleep, say goodnight. A short, predictable phrase like "It's sleepy time, love you, see you in the morning" helps cue your baby for sleep. Then offer a cuddle and place them into their cot while they are drowsy but still awake. This supports the development of independent sleep skills and helps them begin learning how to resettle on their own during the night.


# Supporting Better Sleep – Night and Day



## Room sharing.

For the first six months, safe sleep guidelines recommend that your baby sleeps in the same room as you—day and night. Studies show this reduces the risk of SIDS and helps you keep an eye on your baby while supporting their developing sleep patterns.

## Keeping the room cool.



Most bedrooms don't have individual thermostats, so using an indoor thermometer can help. If your baby feels hot or sweaty, remove a layer of bedding or clothing. Remember—back of the neck or chest is the best place to check for warmth.

## Darkness promotes sleep.

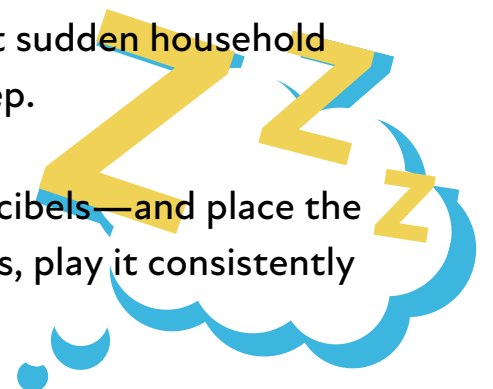
A dark sleep environment encourages melatonin production and reduces distractions. Use blackout blinds or a dark sheet over existing curtains to block out daylight or streetlights. If you prefer to use a night light, choose one with a soft amber or orange glow that won't disrupt your baby's sleep cycle.

## White noise can help.

The steady sound of white noise mimics the reassuring whooshing noises your baby heard in the womb.

It can activate their calming reflex and help block out sudden household sounds that might disturb their sleep.

Keep the volume at a safe level—no louder than 50 decibels—and place the device at least seven feet from the cot. For best results, play it consistently throughout the night.





# sleep cues

## Sleep cues

Babies are very good communicators; long before your baby talks they will use non-verbal cues to tell you what they want. Your baby may have very subtle sleep cues and go quickly from being happy and playful to being tired and fussy.

Here are some of signs of tiredness you will see in your baby:

- Whining or fussing
- Staring blankly into space
- Frowning
- Jerky arms and legs
- Arching of back
- Clenched fists
- Yawning
- Rubs eyes
- Pulling at ears
- Sucking on fingers or fist
- Ignoring interaction and losing interest





# Feeding

## Breast feeding

During the early weeks, your baby will naturally fall asleep feeding. Studies have shown an amino acid found in breast milk can help with your baby's sleep.

This amino acid, called tryptophan, is converted in the body to melatonin. Levels of tryptophan in breast milk fall in the day and rise at night in line with the mother's body clock.

Giving your baby tryptophan, through your breast milk, has shown to help baby's fall asleep faster and to synchronise with the 24 hour day.



# Looking for more help?

We hope this guide has served as a valuable resource, whether you're navigating the early stages with your newborn or preparing for your baby's arrival. Our aim is to empower you with knowledge and confidence, easing the journey into parenthood. Should you find yourself in need of further support or wish to deepen your understanding, please don't hesitate to reach out. We're here to assist you every step of the way, ensuring you and your baby embark on a path to healthy sleep together.

