



# Infant Sleep





**Newborns have unique sleep cycles and patterns due to their underdeveloped circadian rhythm, which regulates their sleep-wake cycle. On average, newborns spend about 16-17 hours a day sleeping,** but these sleep sessions are typically short, ranging from thirty minutes to four hours at a time. It's essential to understand that these are just averages, and your baby may sleep more or less than this. If you have any concerns about your newborn's sleep, it's important to consult with their pediatrician.

**Throughout the first year of life, your baby's sleep patterns will undergo frequent changes.** Factors such as growth spurts, teething, sleep regression stages, or illness can disrupt their sleep. Sleep regressions typically occur at various stages within the first year of life, often around 4 months, 8-10 months, and sometimes around 18 months. These regressions coincide with significant developmental milestones, such as increased mobility, cognitive development, and teething. During these periods, babies may experience disruptions in their sleep patterns, including frequent night waking, shorter naps, and difficulty settling down to sleep. These regressions occur because the baby's brain is undergoing rapid growth and maturation, which can temporarily disrupt their sleep cycles and routines. Additionally, factors such as changes in routine, environmental factors, and separation anxiety may also contribute to sleep disturbances during these periods.

While these awakenings and disturbances can be challenging, it's important to recognize that they are normal and temporary. **When your baby cries, it's crucial to respond to their needs promptly.** Babies are highly dependent on their caregivers for comfort, safety, and security as they continue to grow and develop. By attending to their cries, you provide them with the reassurance they need to feel safe and loved.



**Typically around 4 to 6 months of age, their sleep patterns begin to evolve and consolidate,** becoming more similar to adult sleep cycles. Unlike newborns who sleep in shorter, irregular spurts throughout the day and night, older infants tend to have more structured sleep patterns with longer periods of nighttime sleep and more predictable nap times during the day. By this age, many infants have developed a more established circadian rhythm, which helps regulate their sleep-wake cycles.

**Also around the 4 to 6 months mark, many babies gain the ability to roll from their back to their stomach and vice versa.** This newfound skill can lead to changes in their sleep behavior, as they may instinctively roll over during sleep. While it's a natural part of their development, it can also cause some disruption to their sleep patterns, especially if they're not yet accustomed to sleeping in different positions. Parents should ensure that the sleep environment remains safe, with no loose bedding or objects that could pose a suffocation hazard if the infant rolls over onto them. Additionally, if an infant seems uncomfortable or distressed after rolling over during sleep, gently repositioning them onto their back may help them settle back into sleep.

**Older infants may start to sleep for longer stretches at night, often ranging from 6 to 8 hours or more, with fewer overnight awakenings compared to newborns.** They may also transition to taking fewer but longer naps during the day, typically totaling around 2 to 3 hours of daytime sleep spread across two or three naps. While some variability in sleep patterns is normal, older infants generally have more consolidated sleep, allowing for longer periods of rest for both the baby and the parents.



## Safe Sleep Spaces

### Bassinet, Pack-and-Play Crib/Side-car Cribs:

- Bassinets, pack-and-plays, cribs/side-car cribs are all safe sleep options for your newborn. Ideally you should have their sleep space close to you for quick responsiveness and easy access when they wake up.
- Always place your newborn on its back for sleep.
- Avoid loose sheets, blankets, plush toys, pillows, and bumpers, as they can be a suffocation hazard.
- Opt for a swaddle, sleep sack, and/or warm pajamas to ensure comfort and safety as your little one sleeps, but also be mindful to not overdress/overheat them.

### On Caregiver's Chest:

- One of the most preferred places for newborns to sleep is on you! The closeness of their caregiver offers a familiar scent, familiar sounds (heartbeat & breathing), while also providing them with a sense of warmth and touch.
- When having your newborn sleep on your chest, ensure you can remain awake the entire time to practice best safety (e.g. avoid dropping your baby).





### **Baby-wearing (Sling or Wrap):**

- Utilizing a baby slings or stretch wraps is another safe way to have your baby sleep on you, while also giving your more mobility to get things done.
- When wrapping your baby to your body, ensure they are on securely, with head supported and exposed to air to ensure healthy breathing.

### **Bassinet Stroller:**

- Babies and caregivers can benefit greatly from some fresh air! Take your little one on a daytime stroll around the neighborhood in a baby safe stroller.
- Remember to always place baby on its back. Bassinet strollers are ideal for newborns because of the flat base.
- Ensure your stroller is equipped with a canopy to block strong sun and wind,



# Tips for Better Sleep

## **Be Responsive to Your Baby's Needs:**

Babies should never be left to "cry it out" or self-soothe. Crying is a baby's primary way of communicating their needs, whether it's for food, comfort, diaper change, etc. By promptly responding to these cries, you help build a secure attachment, ensuring that your baby feels safe and supported. Ignoring these cries can lead to increased stress and anxiety for the baby, which can negatively impact brain development and emotional well-being. Studies have shown that responsive caregiving fosters healthy neurological development and emotional regulation in infants.



**Get Outside Every Day:** Exposure to natural light helps regulate your baby's circadian rhythm, which is essential for developing healthy sleep patterns. Taking your baby outside during the day can signal to their body when it's time to be awake and when it's time to sleep. Aim to keep your baby away from screens and artificial lights as much as possible, as these can disrupt their natural sleep-wake cycle and melatonin production.

**Recognize Sleep Cues:** Pay close attention to your baby's "sleepy cues," such as rubbing eyes, yawning, heavy and reddish eyelids, fussiness, and gazing off. Recognizing these signs can help you anticipate when your baby is ready for sleep and prevent overtiredness, which can make it harder for them to fall and stay asleep.





### **Create a Consistent Sleep Time Routine:**

Establishing a predictable pre-sleep routine can signal to your baby that it's time to wind down. Activities like dimming the lights, putting on a white noise machine, and reading a short book can create a calming environment that helps your baby transition to sleep more easily. Consistency in this routine can provide a sense of security and make the process smoother over time.

**Ensure a Safe Sleep Environment:** Always place your baby on their back to sleep and ensure their sleep space is free from loose bedding, pillows, blankets, and toys that could pose a suffocation risk. Use a firm mattress and consider a sleep sack or warm pajamas to keep your baby comfortable and safe without overheating.

