

my baby

infant sleep cycles

Generally, newborns sleep about 16 hours a day. But because their stomachs are so small, they sleep in little spurts, waking every 1-3 hours during the day and night to eat. This can be hard on parents and caregivers, especially those with other responsibilities and children to care for.

Fortunately, the newborn sleep cycle tends to be temporary. As your baby (and their stomach) grows, they will begin to sleep for longer periods of time. Most babies are able to sleep through the night by the time they are one year old (though there are plenty of children who do continue to wake during the night beyond the age of one).



Infant sleep

Just as adults vary in the amount of sleep they need, infant sleep needs vary too. Other factors that can influence your baby's sleep cycle can be how and what they eat, their overall health, and their environment.

How to tell when your baby is ready to sleep

Though your baby cannot tell you they are tired, they do give clues that they are ready to go to sleep. Here are some cues that your baby wants to sleep:

Early cues:

- Yawning
- Turning their head away from you
- Staring off into space
- Slower movements and activity
- Heavy eyelids
- Rubbing their eyes
- Becoming a little fussy

An overtired baby will:

- Arch their back
- Cry through your attempts to soothe
- Will not settle down even though you know they are tired
- Become easily upset

It usually doesn't take much for your baby to go from tired to overtired. So it is a good idea to try to learn your baby's signs that they are getting sleepy and act on them sooner rather than later.

Soothing a tired baby

Placing your newborn, skin-to-skin on you, is a good way to help them settle (see Golden Hour).

You can also do the following:

- Saying "shhhh", gently singing, or using a white noise app (not too loud!)
- Rocking or swaying the baby
- Gently rubbing baby's head
- Patting the baby's back

While changes in sleep habits can be due to hitting a new developmental milestone, sometimes it can be due to illness or something in the environment (like temperature or a dirty diaper) that is bothering them. If your baby is upset and the usual comfort measures are not helping, check their environment. If there is nothing in their environment that could be affecting them, and it continues to be difficult to soothe the baby, it's okay to reach out to their pediatrician for help.

Infant sleep safety

It is important to keep your baby safe when you place them down to sleep. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following:

- Always place your baby on their back to sleep.
- Use only a crib, cradle, or bassinet that meets current American safety standards.
- Keep the baby's sleeping area clear of blankets, toys, and clutter.
- Make sure the baby isn't too hot.
- Sleep in the same room as the baby.
- If you can, try to chest/breastfeed your baby. This has been shown to reduce the likelihood of (sudden infant death syndrome) SIDS.
- Do not smoke around the baby or where they will sleep.
- Do not share a bed, sofa, or any other sleep surface with your baby. If you want to be closer to your baby, place their bassinet or crib close to your bed.

How can I get more sleep?

For the most part, most babies don't start sleeping through the night until about three months. This can vary though - with some babies not sleeping through the night until one year. Some people suggest that "you sleep when the baby sleeps" but this isn't always possible. If you have other children or other responsibilities, it can be hard to slip in time for a nap.

Prioritize sleep

So on the occasion when you have a choice between a task and sleeping, try to sleep. This could mean that the floors aren't mopped or that the clean laundry remains in their baskets. So be it. As long as there are no hazards in your home and everyone's basic needs are met, there is no problem with prioritizing your much needed rest.

Ask for help

Do not be afraid to ask for help. If you have a trusted friend or family member who can help you get a couple hours of sleep, go for it.

We are here for you

If you're worried about your ability to cope with a crying baby, sleep, or anything else, please reach out to us. You're not alone!