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# Newborn sleep patterns: What you need to know

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Is there such a thing as normal newborn sleep patterns? In your dream world, you put your newborn to sleep and they continue that way all night, so you can get your rest, too. But in the real world, baby sleep schedules aren't like that.

Here's what you need to know so that both you and baby get a good night's rest.

## What's normal?

"Normal newborn sleep patterns often consist of a collection of long and short naps," says Krista Guenther, a certified pediatric sleep consultant and founder of Sleeperific, which focuses on sleep consulting for babies. "New babies can sleep upwards of 20 hours per day, but not necessarily in long stretches. It's often the biological drive to eat which leads to waking."

Many babies will only be awake for an hour or so before falling back to sleep. It is sometimes even difficult to get a baby to stay awake to feed. A feeding period can take up to an hour in the early weeks because baby is learning how to do it. So the baby will wake up, feed, fall asleep and then start the process over again, says Karen Schwarzbach, a certified sleep consultant who gives seminars and lectures on getting kids to sleep.

## When do sleep patterns change?

As babies get older and their systems mature, their internal clocks begin to become established. Patterns may start to emerge as early as 12 weeks. Sleep needs naturally decrease as your little one gets older, but a 4-month-old may still need approximately 16 hours per day of sleep, says Guenther. Often a baby's longest sleep period will be in the first part of the evening.

"I encourage parents to follow their child's sleep cues and help them get down for a nap before they become overtired. Sleep cues can include zoning out, rubbing their ears or eyes, turning their head from side to side, yawning or becoming fussy. Once a baby is close to 4 months, regular, but still frequent, naps (usually two a day) and more consistent bedtimes can be encouraged." By 6 months, most babies are sleeping about 14 hours a day; this is broken into 2 to 3 daytime naps as well as nighttime sleeping. While each baby is different, many babies start sleeping through the night between 6 and 9 months.

## Create and maintain a schedule

The best way to create — and maintain — a schedule for your little one is to first follow his cues. "By remaining mindful and aware of the way a child presents sleep cues is far more important than imposing a random schedule on a baby," says Schwarzbach. If your child gets drowsy (rubs eyes, yawns, etc.) each day at 9 a.m. and 2 p.m., then it makes sense to start looking at that as his possible nap times.

Remember each child is different. So your baby may nap at 8 a.m. while another baby naps at 10 a.m. Don't worry about the time as much as following your baby's cues. In terms of maintaining a night schedule, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends these tips for getting a baby to sleep:

- If you're changing your baby in the middle of the night, keep the room dark and don't talk or stimulate your little one.
- Make sure to include lots of playtime during the day — reading books, building blocks — the more active she is during the day, the more likely she'll be ready for sleep at night.
- Ideally, put your little one in the crib when she's still awake (but tired). This way she'll begin to realize that the crib is for sleeping and she'll feel safe and secure there.

- If she cries in the middle of the night, wait a few minutes to see if she'll self-soothe. Often a pacifier, thumb or lovey will do the trick.

Don't worry, the sleepless nights only last a short while. And soon you and your baby will be resting peacefully the whole night through.

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