Getting Baby to Sleep Through the Night

**NEWBORNS (birth to 2 months):** generally requires 16-20 hours of sleep per day, divided equally between day and night

* In the first few weeks, Newborns will generally wake every 2 ½ - 3 hours (day or night) for feedings. Always respond to a newborn’s cry—they are learning to trust.
* Newborns are not aware of “day” or “night” routines for the first few weeks. This is something you will need to teach your baby. During night-time feedings, keep the lights dim and the stimulation minimal. Save the talking, playing, bright lights, and stimulation for the daytime.
* Establish a bedtime routine—several things you do every evening before bed that will help soothe your baby. It may include a warm bath, a massage, a bedtime story, a lullaby, etc. (Edward has a baby massage class that will teach you the correct techniques for infant massage.)
* Newborns will sleep better if they are swaddled. Try wrapping your baby securely in a blanket with his hands at waist level, keeping the blankets away from his face. Or you can purchase a “swaddle-me” blanket that has Velcro closures.
* After a feeding, be sure to place your baby on his back in the crib **while still drowsy**—before he is fully asleep. If he falls asleep during the feeding, wake him gently by checking his diaper again. Your baby needs to be aware of being in the crib when he goes to sleep, so that he will recognize it when he wakes during the night. This will help him later to be able to soothe himself back to sleep.
* Give your baby a pacifier to help soothe him to sleep. Don’t replace the pacifier if it comes out of his mouth during sleep. (If you are breastfeeding, please wait until your baby is taking the breast well before introducing a pacifier—usually about 3-4 weeks of age.)
* Try using white noise in the baby’s room at night (can be a fan, a radio turned to static, or a CD of a heartbeat or raindrops, etc).
* Make sure your baby gets plenty of activity and play-time during the day. Keep night-time calm, with minimal stimulation.
* A newborn needs to get in 10-12 feedings per day in order to gain weight. Feed your baby “on-demand” during the daytime but allow no longer than 3 hours between feedings. If you get the majority of his feedings in during the daytime, he can sleep longer at night—and so can you! Usually by the time he is 2 months old, he will be able to go longer between his night-time feedings, giving you an average of 5 hours of sleep.

**TWO TO FOUR MONTHS OLD:** generally requires about 13 hours of sleep per day—several daytime naps with a longer stretch at night—average is 6-7 hours but may be as long as 8-9 hours

As he gets older (around 2 months), to help space out the feedings longer at night, don’t go in to pick him up until he is actively awake. Sometimes babies will stir and start to make noises, then go back to sleep for another hour! Try to feed him around 11 pm (or around your bedtime) to avoid a 3 a.m. feeding.

 Be sure your baby is getting plenty of feedings in during the day and gaining weight adequately before trying to limit his night-time feedings. If you have gone back to work and wish to continue as many breastfeedings at home as possible, your baby may get used to a different routine where he eats more frequently in the evening and night while you are home and then goes longer stretches without eating during the daytime when you are at work. Some mothers are willing to use this schedule for the few months necessary until baby is old enough to start with solids.

**SIX MONTHS OR OLDER:** generally requires around 13 hours of sleep with a 3 hour nap during the day and 9-11 hours of sleep at night

If your baby is old enough to sleep through the night but isn’t, here are a few tips that might help:

* When your baby cries at night, try waiting a few minutes before going in to him so that he will have a chance to soothe himself. If he is still crying after 2-3 minutes, go in and check his diaper, soothe him with gentle words and pats on the back, but don’t pick him up. Then leave even if he is crying. Wait a few minutes longer (4-5 minutes) before going back in and doing the same soothing technique. Try to wait a few minutes longer each time, without picking him up and without feeding him. The next night, start with a longer interval (5-6 minutes) before going in the first time. It may take about a week for your baby to realize he won’t get fed and he needs to soothe himself to sleep.
* Some parents do not wish to hear their baby cry and will prefer to pick up baby and rock him, giving him a pacifier but not a feeding during the middle of the night.

If your baby has been sleeping through the night and suddenly starts crying at night, be sure that there isn’t a reason—ear infection or other illness, teething, etc. Babies may revert to an earlier stage when an interruption to their schedule occurs—such as a vacation, sleeping in a different room, etc. Also, when baby learns to roll over, crawl, or pull himself up for the first time, he may not be able to get back to his comfortable sleep position and may cry.

--By Susan Bard, RN, BA, CCE, CBC, Perinatal Education Coordinator for Edward Hospital. January 2013.