



Sleep and Your Infant

Getting enough sleep after having a baby can be hard for many parents.

This handout explains normal infant sleep and gives you tips that may help you and your baby sleep better.

Getting enough sleep is needed for normal growth and development. Infants who have enough sleep are happier and have an easier time the next day.

Make sure you follow safe sleep recommendations. You can find these on the Healthy Families BC website.



How do babies sleep?

- Infants sleep differently than older children or adults. Their sleep cycles are shorter, usually 50–60 minutes long. A sleep cycle includes both light and deep sleep. At the end of the sleep cycle babies may wake or go back to sleep again.
- Infants spend a lot of time in light or active sleep. This is important for their brain development. They may wake from light sleep more easily.

- When young infants fall asleep, they begin their sleep cycle in light sleep. They may arouse 20–30 minutes later when they try to enter deep sleep. After 6 months, babies usually begin their sleep in deep sleep. This will help them stay asleep longer.
- At birth, the day-night pattern of wake and sleep is not well developed. Your newborn may sleep at any time of the day. By 3 months, more of your baby's sleep occurs at night. This is the time when some infants begin to settle and sleep for 5 hours or more.
- As infants get older most sleep occurs at night. Babies 6–12 months of age take 1-3 naps per day. Your baby's sleep patterns may change every few months during the first year.

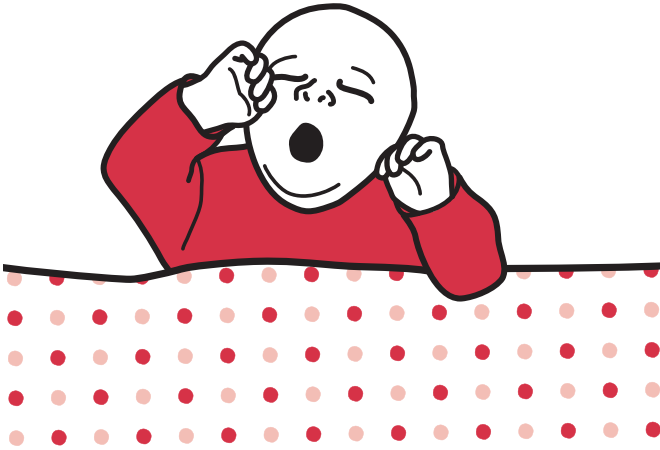
How much sleep does your baby need in a 24 hour day?

Age in months	Average daily amount of sleep (in hours)	Daily range of sleep (in hours)
0–2	15	9–20
3	14	9–18
6	13	9–17
9	13	9–16
12	13	10–16

Each baby is different and some need more sleep than others. Paying attention to your baby's cues and behaviour will help you tell if your baby is getting enough sleep.

What are some signs that your baby is tired?

- Rubbing eyes, pulling ears, yawning, rocking head back and forth
- Losing interest in people or toys
- Looking away, not focusing
- Jerky movements, making fists
- Being irritable, fussing or crying (these may also be signs of being overtired)



What can keep your baby from sleeping well?

- During growth spurts babies may wake more often as they need more feedings.
- As babies reach new developmental milestones they may not sleep well. For example, this may happen when they are learning to roll, crawl, walk or talk.
- A baby may have a physical problem, such as illness, fever or pain. For example, ear infection, reflux, diaper rash, teething or tooth decay.
- After 6 months, many infants experience separation anxiety and may not want to be left alone for sleeping.
- Changes in routine may affect babies' sleep. For example, this can happen during moving, travelling or with busy daytime schedules.
- Infants are sensitive to the feelings of others around them. Stress in the family, such as depression, relationship conflict or financial worries may lead to sleep problems.

What does sleeping through the night mean?

Sleeping through the night is defined as a 5–6 hour stretch of sleep during the night hours. Some babies start sleeping through the night after about 6 weeks and will continue to sleep well. Other babies who slept well before may start waking up more often, especially after 4–6 months. Many babies will not sleep a 5–6 hour stretch at night until closer to 6 months of age. Still others will continue to wake at night in their first year or beyond. All of these patterns are normal.

Some parents feel pressure to have their babies sleep long stretches at night. Frequent night waking may lead to very tired parents. What is a sleep concern varies from family to family. What is important is that you and your baby get enough sleep.

What can you do to help your infant sleep better?

For infants 0–6 months

- Have realistic expectations. Young babies wake frequently to feed and cuddle.
- Expose your baby to natural light and regular noise and activities during the day. Leave the room quiet and dark at night. Attend to your baby's needs at night but do not play with her. Keeping the day and night different will help your baby develop regular sleep-wake patterns.
- Follow your baby's sleep cues and drowsy signs.
- Try to place your baby in the crib when baby is drowsy but not yet asleep. Quiet white noise (fan, ocean waves) may help your baby settle and sleep longer. Soothe your baby as needed, for example by cuddling, carrying or rocking.
- Babies fall asleep easily with breastfeeding.





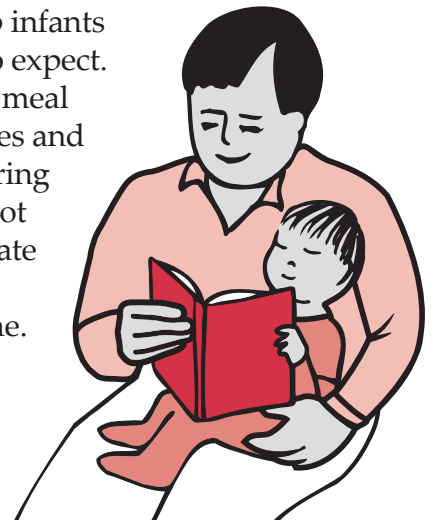
- It is recommended to have your baby sleep in your room for the first 6 months of their life. Having the crib beside your bed makes it easier to attend to your baby at night.
- Babies make many sleeping sounds, such as grunts and whimpers. If you respond too quickly you may wake the baby. Learn the difference between sleeping and awake sounds.
- Work towards having a calming bedtime routine. For example, read a story, put on soft music or sing lullabies. Find out what helps your baby relax. Infant massage has been shown to help babies sleep better.



For infants 6–12 months

- You can continue to breastfeed your baby to sleep if it is not a problem for you. If bottle feeding, do not allow your baby to sleep with a bottle.
- Your baby may associate sucking and relaxing at the breast with falling asleep. If this concerns you, try to remove the nipple when your baby is drowsy but not fully asleep. Let him fall asleep without sucking.
- If your breastfed baby wakes up to feed a lot at night, try to breastfeed more often during the day. Make sure your baby is eating solid food as recommended. Follow your baby's hunger and fullness cues when offering food.
- A “dream feed” may help your baby sleep longer. Before you are going to sleep gently rouse your baby to breastfeed.

- Routines help infants know what to expect. Have regular meal times, activities and nap times during the day. Try not to overstimulate your baby before bedtime. A predictable and calming bedtime routine will help create sleep associations for your baby. Create a ritual such as: bath (if not too stimulating), mouth care, putting on clean diaper and pajamas, close curtains, read bedtime story, sing lullaby, place baby in crib.



- If you want your baby to fall asleep on his own, place him in the crib when he is drowsy but still awake. If he is crying, comfort your baby but gradually pay less attention to him. Try to soothe him in the crib without picking him up. It may take time before your baby settles. You may stay close to your baby at first but gradually move farther away from him until you are no longer in his bedroom.

- You may choose to leave the room for a few minutes after placing your baby in the crib. When you return try to comfort him while keeping baby in the crib. Gradually increase the time you are out of the baby's room (up to 10 minutes). Your baby will cry but eventually will fall asleep. Check on him anytime you are worried about his safety.



What can parents do to get more sleep?

- Follow your instincts! No one approach to infant sleep will work for every family. Seek out people who support your decision about your baby's sleep.
- Try to catch up with your own sleep. Rest or sleep when your baby naps. Let friends or family watch your baby while you nap. Go to sleep early or sleep when you have someone at home who can help with your baby. If possible get help with household chores.
- Look after yourself. For example, talk to a friend, go for a walk or do something relaxing.
- Talk to your Public Health Nurse if you continue to have concerns about your baby's sleep.



Other fact sheets on parenting your child are available at your local Community Health Office/Centre or online at <http://vch.eduhealth.ca>

For more information and help, contact a Public Health Nurse at
Vancouver Coastal Health www.vch.ca
or visit the VCH Parenting Website parenting.vch.ca

For more copies, go online at <http://vch.eduhealth.ca> or
email phem@vch.ca and quote Catalogue No. **GK.600.S541**
Please send any feedback about this handout to feedback@vch.ca
© Vancouver Coastal Health, April 2017

The information in this document is intended solely for the
person to whom it was given by the health care team.
www.vch.ca