

Newborn Babies and Sleep

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *The No-Cry Sleep Solution*

Congratulations on the birth of your new baby.

This is a glorious time in your life—and a sleepless time too. Newborns have different sleep needs than older babies. This article will help you understand your baby's developing sleep patterns and will help you create reasonable expectations for sleep.



Newborn Sleep

Your newborn sleeps when he is tired — it's that simple. You can do little to force a new baby to sleep when he doesn't want to sleep, and you can do little to wake him up when he is sleeping soundly.

Newborn babies have tiny tummies. They grow rapidly, and their liquid diet digests quickly. While it would be nice to lay your little bundle down at bedtime and not hear from him until morning, this is not a realistic goal for a new baby. Newborns wake to be fed every two to four hours — and sometimes more.

"Through the night"

You may believe that babies should start "sleeping through the night" soon after birth. For a new baby, a *five-hour stretch* is a full night. This may be a far cry from what you thought "sleeping through the night" meant! It's often a full year or more until your baby will settle into an all-night, every night sleep pattern.

Sleep Associations

It is natural for a newborn to fall asleep while sucking at the breast, a bottle, or a pacifier. When a baby *always* falls asleep this way, he learns to associate sucking with falling asleep. This is the most natural sleep association a baby can have. However, many parents who are struggling with older babies who cannot fall asleep, or stay asleep, are fighting this powerful association.

Therefore, if you want your baby to be able to fall asleep without your help, it is essential that you often let your newborn baby suck until he is sleepy, but not totally asleep. When you can, remove the breast, bottle, or pacifier from his mouth, and let him finish falling asleep without it. If you do this often enough, he will learn how to fall asleep without sucking.

Night Feedings

Professionals recommend that a newborn shouldn't sleep longer than four hours without feeding, and most babies wake more frequently than that. The key is to learn when you should pick her up for a feeding and when you

can let her go back to sleep on her own.

Here's a tip: Babies make many sleeping sounds, from grunts to whimpers to cries, and these noises don't always signal awakening. These are *sleeping noises*, and your baby is not awake during these episodes. Listen closely. If she is awake and hungry, you'll want to feed her so she'll go back to sleep easily. But if she's asleep — let her sleep!

Telling Day from Night

A newborn sleeps 16 to 18 hours per day, distributed into six to seven sleep periods. You can help your baby distinguish between night sleep and day sleep, and thus help him sleep longer periods at night.

Have your baby take naps in a lit room where he can hear the noises of the day. Make night sleep dark and quiet, except for white noise (a background hum). Use a bath, a massage, and pajamas to signal nighttime sleep.

