



Sleep, Baby, Sleep

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We have all heard of chronically overtired moms and dads, but have you thought that a baby could also be chronically overtired? Infants who don't get enough sleep or who sleep poorly are often seen by their parents as difficult and highly stressful. Often, when this happens, babies suffer from not only their own poor sleep quality but from the impatience of their exhausted parents. Unfortunately, well-meaning parents and caregivers often contribute to the sleep difficulties of little ones.

Some believe in the "cry-it-out" approach to getting babies to sleep, while others believe that a baby needs to be held and rocked until he falls asleep naturally. While there are many "okay" ways to help babies sleep, I'd like to suggest that the most sensible and compassionate approach is to respond to a baby's cries, yet the ways we do that can be effective or not effective. More than 50 percent of babies who suffer from sleep problems continue these problems as they grow up to the preschool and school-age periods, but parents can improve their infant's sleep and in turn get more rest themselves.

While time and space does not allow for a full exploration of babies and sleep, I suggest Elizabeth Pantley's book *The No-Cry Sleep Solution: Gentle Ways to Help Your Baby Sleep Through the Night*, McGraw-Hill/Contemporary Publishing, 2002.

Here are some baby-sleep facts:

- ▶ Newborn babies sleep 16–18 hours a day, distributed evenly over six to seven brief sleep periods.
- ▶ All babies awaken in the night, usually two to three times a night up to six months, and once or twice a night up to one year. Some awaken once a night through the first two years.
- ▶ A baby is considered "sleeping through the night" when she sleeps five consecutive hours. While this may not be your definition of sleeping through the night, it is the reasonable yardstick by which we measure baby's sleep.
- ▶ Most babies are primed to go to sleep for the night as early as 6:30 or 7:30 p.m. (Pantley, 2002). Babies and toddlers often have "melt down" periods at the end of the day when they get fussy and whiny. They are exhibiting signs of being overtired and longing for sleep.
- ▶ Keeping your baby up so he will sleep longer or later usually backfires.
- ▶ Regular naps improve nighttime sleep. Naps should happen immediately when a baby shows signs of tiredness. If you wait too long, baby will become overtired, "wired up," and unable to sleep.
- ▶ Babies can learn how to fall asleep without help by spending daily quiet time in their own bed. It helps when they are encouraged to fall asleep for naps in various places and ways.
- ▶ Babies benefit from sleep cues: special music or words, routines that they can count on.
- ▶ Babies benefit when their parents and caregivers recognize their cues—such as making sleeping sounds (grunts to whimpers to cries), fussing, yawning, quieting down, losing interest in toys, or looking "glazed."
- ▶ It helps babies learn the difference between nighttime sleeping and naps when they take daily naps near the noises of the day in a lit room, and night sleep is dark and quiet. They understand that night sleep is coming when they have a bath and a change into pajamas.
- ▶ If you want to make some changes in getting baby to sleep, remember that it is a process that will take energy, commitment, and a week or more of adjustment to settle in to a new bedtime.

