

“People who say they sleep like a baby, usually don’t have one.”  
—Leo J. Burke



# sweet dreams

Helping infants get the restful sleep they—and you—need

Whoever refers to a great night’s slumber as “sleeping like a baby” has obviously never had a newborn. Trying to get infants to sleep through the night is arguably one of the hardest adjustments to parenthood. And when a parent must soon return to the outside workforce, the resulting stress level can reach epic proportions.

“I had read all the books so I thought I was prepared,” admits new mom Lynn Lelong. “I just had no idea how hard it would be to get my baby’s sleep sorted out.”

Much of infant brain development takes place during sleep, placing it on par with such basics as good nutrition and warm clothing as a priority for health. Fine. In my humble opinion, of equal importance is the fact that a properly sleeping baby also makes for happier, healthier parents.

Before jumping on the sleep-through-the-night bandwagon, it’s good to head-off some frustrations by setting realistic expectations based upon your infant’s age.

“Newborns have a limit of four to five hours that they can go between feedings. By two months of age, half of bottle-fed infants can sleep through the night (defined as a period of at least seven consecutive hours). At five or six months of age, the majority of both breast-fed and bottle-fed infants can sleep through the night,” explains local pediatrician Dr. Keith Collins.

Predictable daytime nap periods fall into place around the same time that nighttime sleep lengthens. Dr. Collins warns that, “all children are different. Some take ‘cat naps’ of 15 to 20 minutes while others will sleep for one to two hours at a time during the day.”

After the successful introduction of solid foods between four and six months of age, if parents are still having sleep difficulties, the cause might be behavioral—waking by habit rather than a need for nutrition—and parents can start “sleep training” in earnest.

This doesn’t mean that you have to jump directly to the very effective yet controversial “cry it out” method made famous by Richard Ferber’s book, *Solve Your Child’s Sleep Prob-*



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*lems*. Many find that the introduction of routines will do the trick. Infants are comforted by the predictability a routine affords. Zero in on the method by which you will put your child to bed (there’s the tried-and-true trio of bath, books and bed). Over time, your infant will follow your bedtime cues.

A seasoned mom of two, with a third on the way, Beth Tees recalls, “Once the routine was established for each child, we really needed to stick to it to achieve a harmonious environment. When they know what is coming next they feel more secure and in control.”

Whatever bedtime ritual your family decides upon, consistency is the true key to success. At least in the first year, any deviation from what you hope to become the norm can set you back. Some things can’t be helped—bouts of teething or an illness would get my son Harrison hopelessly off his sleep schedule for days on end.

Many moms, myself included, find an infant feeding pattern a successful prelude to naps and nighttime sleep. While the medical community argues there is no scientific correlation between eating and sleeping, we say the proof is in the sleeping

infant. If you continue to breast- or bottle-feed purely on demand (as is recommended in the first weeks of life), solid, predictable sleep may elude your family for longer than if you reach the relative nirvana of three or four hours between each feeding.

Once you've regulated their feedings, most infants are ready to nap after two hours of wake time and are ready to go to sleep, *for the night*, by 8 p.m. Delightful.

## Seven steps to sounder sleep:

- 1 Set your family's sleep standard and stick with it.
- 2 Put your infant to bed while still awake (although barely). Rocking your sweet one to sleep is nice, but you'll want your child to learn how to soothe himself to sleep instead.
- 3 Consider using a "white noise" machine which emits a steady static sound (a radio alarm clock tuned to a non-station can achieve the same effect). The noise masks erratic household sounds and can signal your baby that it's sleep time when it is first turned on.
- 4 Embrace the pacifier. Not only have they been shown to help reduce the risk of SIDS, they can also be powerful soothing tool for both naps and nighttime sleep.
- 5 Consider waking your child for a final feeding right before *your* bedtime. It goes against an already exhausted parent's grain to wake a sleeping infant, but you may find an extra feeding at 10:30 p.m. can prevent a more disruptive 3 a.m. wake up.
- 6 Purchase an interactive crib toy that plays soothing music. Look for a type of toy that can be turned on by your child's feet months before she'll have the coordination to use her hands.
- 7 Outfit your nursery windows with black-out shades. If you keep your baby's room dark, he or she is more likely to sleep in past the first hint of day-break.



### recommended reading:

*Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child* by Marc Weissbluth. Learn about the science of sleep, establish realistic sleep expectations at each age and avoid common parental pitfalls at bedtime.

*Is my Child Overtired?: The Sleep Solution for Raising Happier, Healthier Children* by Will Wilkoff. This pediatrician turned author stresses the importance of setting up routines for a balanced family life.

*The Contented Little Baby: The Simple Secrets of Calm, Confident Parenting* by Gina Ford. This book gives you the how along with the why. Written by a British nanny, it spells out sample routines and how they should shift every few weeks for the first year of life. 🌸