



5 TIPS FOR BETTER BABY SLEEP

Nicole Johnson, sleep coach and owner of The Baby Sleep Site™

Teaching a baby to fall asleep and stay asleep should be a top priority for new parents as sleep deprivation can lead to childhood obesity, depression, behavioral problems, illness and learning difficulties.

“Luckily, there are proven techniques that can really help babies and parents find a better night’s sleep,” says Nicole Johnson, the owner of The Baby Sleep Site™ and a sleep coach who helps parents with their children’s sleep issues. “These five tips will give parents a great start.”

1. Develop a Sleep Routine – Children thrive on routine and predictability. With proper nap and bedtime routines, a child will know what to expect and begin to welcome sleep as part of the daily schedule. A typical bedtime routine might last 20-30 minutes (possibly longer for spirited children) and include diaper and pajamas, a quiet game, breastfeeding/bottle/cup (for babies under 2), teeth brushing, potty (if applicable), reading, cuddling, and then lights out. A nap routine is similar to the bedtime routine, but usually shorter, about 10 minutes.

Johnson excludes a bath from the bedtime routine. Parents simply may not have time or energy to bathe their child every day, and, until they are older and getting very dirty, there is no need. Second, if a child is spirited, a bath may actually do more to energize the child than calm him.

2. Schedule an Early Bedtime – An early bedtime is crucial to a good night’s sleep. When babies and young children are overtired, they may have more difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep and will often wake too early in the morning. While many parents think that keeping a child up later at night is best, it’s actually the early bedtime that will lead to a more restful sleep and a later waking in the morning.

3. Ensure Baby Takes Naps – The better a child naps during the day, the better she will sleep at night because she’s less likely to be overtired at bedtime. A good nap lasts at least one hour and is in a quiet, sedentary location, versus in a stroller, swing or car, which is not nearly as restorative. Shorter, more frequent naps are common during baby’s first 6 months. If your baby is in daycare, you may need to work with the daycare providers to establish routines and limits to enable the child to nap longer.

4. Avoid Sleep Associations – Babies, like all humans, have natural sleep cycles, which are periodic awakenings throughout the night. (We rarely remember them in the morning.) If a baby falls asleep using a soothing technique, like a pacifier, bottle, nursing, or rocking, which he cannot replicate on his own when he awakens between sleep cycles, he will likely cry out for Mom or Dad to help him back to sleep. So it’s important for parents to put the baby into his bed awake, so that he falls asleep on his own and will be able to put himself back to sleep during the night.



5. Manage Night Feedings – Through the first nine months, it is considered normal for babies to eat one or two times overnight. Some stop much sooner on their own accord or with just a little nudge from mom. If a baby is eating more frequently than that or she is older than nine months, Mom may want to consider cutting back (or cutting out) feedings. All babies are different and experts disagree as to when overnight feeding should stop. A mom knows her baby best and will be best able to determine whether she still needs to eat at night, but any more than two feedings after three months old and she probably has a sleep association with nursing or the bottle.

Johnson reminds parents that everyone's situation is unique and that what works for one family may not work for another. "It takes courage and dedication to work through your baby's sleep issues, but the time you spend will be well worth it," says Johnson. "Without chronic sleep deprivation, you and your baby will be happier and healthier!"

Nicole Johnson is a sleep coach and the owner of The Baby Sleep Site™, (<http://www.babysleepsite.com>) specializing in baby sleep products and consulting services. She is also the President of Babble Soft (<http://www.babblesoft.com>), a premier baby software company that further helps new parents with baby sleep issues. Nicole is a wife and the mother of two boys. With a B.A. degree from UC Berkeley and an MBA from Ohio State University, Nicole has also received an honorary degree in "Surviving Sleep Deprivation," thanks to her son's "no sleep" curriculum. She has become an expert on infant and toddler sleep and has made it her mission to help other parents solve their child's sleep problems, too.

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