

# Sleep and your growing baby



Region of Waterloo  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
EMERGENCY SERVICES

Sleep is very important to your baby's growth and development and can affect behaviour, attention, learning and memory. As your baby grows and develops, their sleep patterns will change. It's important to understand what to expect and what you can do to help your baby learn good sleep habits.

### Did you know?

- Questions about infant sleep are one of the most common questions parents ask health care providers. **You are not alone.**
- Physical activity during the day promotes sleep. If your baby is not yet mobile, they need at least thirty minutes of tummy time spread throughout the day, while they are awake.
- It is important to keep electronics out of your baby's sleep area as the light from

"devices" can interfere with your baby's sleep (and yours!)

### Sleep patterns – what to expect

#### Babies younger than three months:

- Sleep 16-18 hours during a 24 hour period, for a few hours at a time
- Sleep is not regular
- Spend a lot of time in "light sleep" (may twitch, make small movements and sounds and may startle easily)
- Cannot tell the difference between day and night
- The safest place for your baby to sleep is on their back, in a crib, cradle or bassinet. It's recommended that you share a room with your baby for the first six months of your baby's life

### Babies three to six months:

- Sleep 14-16 hours during a 24 hour period
- Sleep is more regular
- Your baby will begin to stay awake longer during the day and sleep for longer stretches at night
- Naptimes begin to be more regular. Most babies need three naps a day. Daytime sleep is important for nighttime sleep

### Babies six months to one year:

- Sleep 13-15 hours in a 24 hour period
- Naptimes, bedtime and wake times have a fairly regular routine
- Naps will probably change from three naps a day to two longer naps, in the morning and afternoon

- When babies can turn on their own from back-to-front and back again (typically about five to six months of age) they do not need to be repositioned onto their back if they roll over during sleep

## Ways to help your baby learn good sleep habits

Good sleep habits start right from birth. While there are no magic answers and every baby is different, there is a lot you can do to help your baby begin building healthy sleep habits.

### For babies right from birth:

- **Have realistic expectations.** Babies are all unique. Your baby's sleep patterns will change as they grow and develop.
- **Get to know when your baby is tired.** Look for cues (e.g. rubs eyes, yawns) and then prepare your baby for sleep.



Responding to your baby's cues promptly will make it easier for your baby to fall asleep and prevent your baby from becoming overtired. An overtired baby may take longer to settle down and go to sleep.

- **When your baby is sleeping, let natural sunlight in your home during the day and keep the lights low at night.** This will help your baby learn the difference between day and night.

**For babies two months of age and older:**

- **Place your baby in their crib on their back to sleep every time.** If you always put your baby in their crib to sleep (day and night), your baby will learn that this is the place where they sleep.

- **Wait a few minutes to see if your baby is trying to settle to sleep in their crib or needs you.** Some babies may move around, put their hands in their mouth, cry a little or make noises as they try to settle to sleep on their own (self-soothe). Before you respond, listen for a few minutes to see if your baby can settle to sleep. If after a few minutes your baby isn't settled or is crying more, it's important to tend to your baby's needs and comfort them.

**For babies three months of age and older:**

- **Have the same daytime routines, such as regular feeding, play times, and sleep times.** You can use a shorter version of your bedtime routine for putting your baby down for a nap.



- **Have the same bedtime routine.** Choose relaxing activities that your baby enjoys (e.g. bath, reading a book, gentle massage). A bedtime routine should last 20-30 minutes.
- **When possible, try to put your baby down to sleep in their crib when they are drowsy.**

## Common Sleep Questions

**My baby will only sleep in my arms. What can I do?**

If your baby falls asleep in your arms and wakes up when they are moved to their crib, they will need and want the same condition they had before to fall asleep again – your arms.

It takes patience and consistency to have your baby get used to a new way of falling asleep. You can try putting your baby down in their

crib when they are drowsy, and try to settle them in their crib by patting, stroking or shushing.

**Why does my baby wake up as soon as I put them in the crib?**

Babies under six months of age spend more time in a “light sleep” stage than older babies and adults.

Light sleep occurs at the beginning of your baby’s sleep cycle. During light sleep, your baby may startle easily, make sounds, and wake easily. As your baby grows, your baby’s sleep cycle will mature and they will spend less time in light sleep.

It can be helpful to try and have your baby fall asleep in their crib, drowsy but awake, so you don’t have to transfer them while they are still in light sleep.

## What does drowsy but awake look like?

A baby who is “drowsy but awake” will begin to have more regular respirations, be in a calm state, and may begin to close their eyes. This is the stage right before your baby falls asleep, but they are not yet sleeping.

## Why does my baby wake up at night?

All babies go through different stages of sleep at night. At the end of each sleep cycle, it is normal that your baby will briefly wake and then drift back into sleep again.

An infant sleep cycle is about 45-60 minutes in length, which is about half the length of an adult’s sleep cycle. This means that all babies will wake up naturally in their sleep cycle. Sometimes they will settle back to sleep on

their own, and sometimes they will require a feeding or your attention.

## When will my baby sleep through the night?

All babies are different. Babies under six months of age need frequent feedings in 24 hours, and that includes feedings at night. As your baby’s brain matures, your baby will be able to sleep for longer periods.

## Why is my baby waking up frequently when for several months we had a good sleep routine?

Consider what is going on in your baby’s life. Your baby’s sleep can be affected by many things. These could include teething, illness, separation from a parent, a change in family routine, a new sibling, growth spurts and even learning a new skill like sitting or walking.



In popular parent books and websites the term “sleep regression” is used to refer to these changes in sleep behaviour. When this happens, be patient and consistent and try to maintain your bedtime routine. With time and patience, your baby’s sleep will likely get back on track.



## Sources:

[www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca)

<https://www.zerotothree.org/>

Barnard, E.K. & Thomas, A.T. (2014) Beginning Rhythms: The Emerging process of sleep wake behaviour and self- regulation (2ed).Seattle; Washington. NCAST programs. University of Washington

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## For more information:

- Call Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services at 519-575-4400 and ask to speak with a Public Health Nurse
- Go to [www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca)

You know your baby best. If you’re concerned about your baby’s sleep, talk to your health care provider.



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