

Sleep in the first year



A baby's sleep can be one of the most challenging things about being a parent. Working out their sleep patterns and how to settle your baby can take time and practice. Waking and sleeping patterns change monthly in the first year. Many parents find their own sleep is disrupted. All this is normal but it can take time to adjust. Being prepared can help.

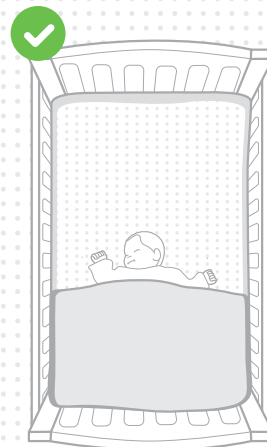
In the first year of a baby's life, the best way to support their sleep and healthy development is to focus on meeting their needs as much as you can. This will support positive sleep habits, help you get to know your baby and feel more confident as a parent.



Safe Sleep

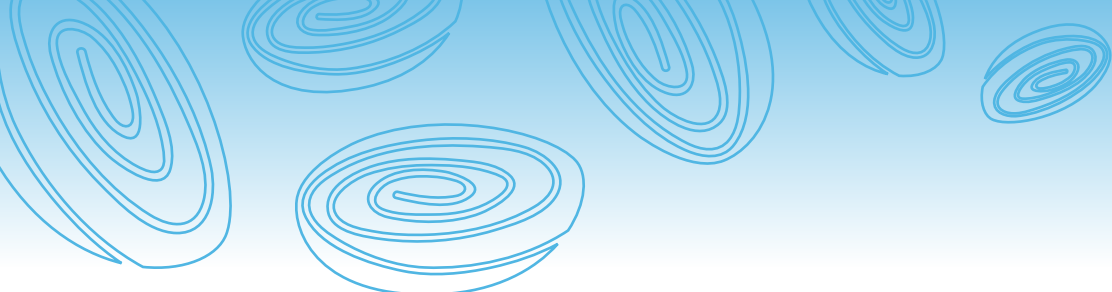
For all babies 0-12 months, Red Nose recommends:

- always place baby on their back to sleep
- keep baby's face and head uncovered
- keep baby smoke free, before and after birth
- a safe sleeping environment, night and day
- sleep baby in a safe cot in parents' or caregivers' room for the first 6 months
- breastfeed baby (if you can).



- **Safe cot**
Meets Australian standard AS/NZS 2172:2003.
- **Safe mattress**
Firm, flat, right size for your safe cot, never tilted or elevated and meets voluntary Australian standard (AS/NZS 8811.1:2013).
- **Safe bedding**
Lightweight bedding, firmly tucked in and only pulled up to the chest.

Safe sleeping bag, well fitted across the neck and chest, with baby's arm out, and no hood.



The safest place for a baby to sleep is in their own safe sleep space. This is why bringing them into bed with you, called co-sleeping, is not recommended. If you do co-sleep it is important to know the safest way to do it.

- parents being there for them during both the day and night.

Babies usually have periods of frequent waking when they are going through a phase of rapid physical, mental or emotional development.

Follow these tips to **minimise the risks**

- Always place baby on their back to sleep
- Create a clear sleep space for baby to sleep
- Make sure baby's face and head remain uncovered
- Tie up long hair and remove all jewellery including teething necklaces
- Place baby to the side of one parent – never in the middle of two adults or next to other children or pets
- Move the bed away from the wall – so baby can't get trapped between the bed and the wall
- Keep pillows away from baby's sleep space
- Use a safe sleeping bag with no hood and baby's arms out – don't wrap or swaddle baby
- Make sure the mattress is firm and flat
- Make sure your bedding and sheets can't cover baby's face
- Make sure baby can't fall off the bed



Falling asleep holding your baby on a couch or chair is always unsafe. Move both of you to a safe sleep environment if you think you might fall asleep.

Understanding your baby's sleep

It used to be thought, particularly in Western culture, that babies benefitted from certain sleep 'rules'. Research now shows it helps their healthy growth and development when parents respond to their needs as much as possible. This builds trust and their ability to settle with less help over time. Babies' needs include:

- being fed frequently day and night
- preferring to sleep knowing an adult caregiver is nearby day and night
- being helped to fall asleep, through feeding, motion, warmth and comfort
- being picked up by an adult caregiver if they cry

Responding to your baby's needs is not spoiling them. Knowing you are there helps them feel safe, secure and connected to you.

Crying and unsettled babies

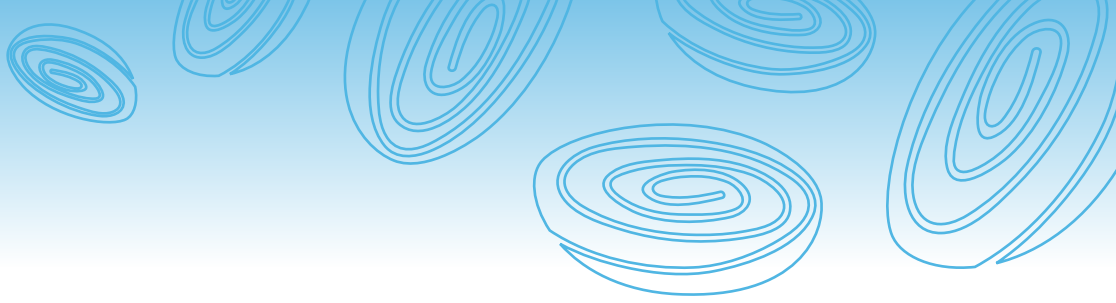
Crying is a baby's main way of communicating. They cry when they are hungry, tired, uncomfortable, sick or in pain, or because they need comfort. Sometimes it feels like they cry for no reason and just need to be held and supported. The world can be a scary place to a newborn and all they know is you. You are their safe place.

It can be hard to work out what your crying baby needs. Babies feel safe and secure when you interact with them in warm, loving, responsive ways. Your baby learns to understand their new world through touch and sound. Picking them up, cuddling them and talking to them teaches them they are safe and loved.

It's normal for babies to cry for three or more hours a day. Sometimes babies cry even when you've tried everything. If your baby often cries and is hard to soothe it can cause feelings of anxiety, depression, helplessness, anger or frustration. At times like this it's important to find ways to look after yourself. When your baby is safe you could give yourself a break, go to another room and take a few deep breaths. It can also help to talk to someone. The Parent Helpline is a good source of information and support.

If you feel angry or upset, remember never shake a baby – it can cause brain damage.





Sleep cycles

There are two main kinds of sleep – light, active sleep and deep, quiet sleep. During light, active sleep your baby is going over the day's events, they may twitch and wake more easily. Babies have a lot of light, active sleep and although it may not look restful it is important. This is when babies' brains are strengthening skills they are learning or practising. Deep quiet sleep is when growing and healing take place. It is much harder to wake from this kind of sleep.

Babies have short sleep cycles of about 20-50 minutes. These get longer as they grow. Babies will often wake between cycles and need a feed or your help to go back to sleep. These short sleep cycles allow babies to have more light sleep, which is important for healthy growth and brain development.

Learning your baby's cues

Playing and spending time with your baby during the day is important. They can learn and practise new skills while becoming tired enough to sleep. It also gives you time to get to know each other and enjoy each other's company.

As you get to know your baby, you will start to recognise some of their body language or sounds as a sign they are getting tired or need a change of activity. Sometimes it can be hard to tell tiredness from other things such as boredom, discomfort, loneliness or frustration. Trying to get a baby who is not tired to go to sleep can be frustrating for both parents and babies.

Settling your baby

There are many ways to help your baby sleep. Settle them in a quiet space, turn off the TV, dim the lights, and remove any other sound and light that may keep them awake. Some parents like to rock, cuddle or feed their baby to sleep in their arms. Others put baby in their cot and hum, pat or shush. Do what feels right for your baby. If they need help calming you could start out with quick firm movements, eg rocking, patting, then slow down these movements as they settle.

Bedtime routines

A bedtime routine to help your baby sleep can be started at any age and usually includes 3-4 calming activities. Doing these in the same order gives your baby a sense of safety and predictability. It can increase their sleep and create a solid foundation for healthy sleep.

Typical calming activities include:

- feeding
- bathing or dressing for bed
- reading a book
- singing a lullaby or song
- massaging, cuddling or rocking.

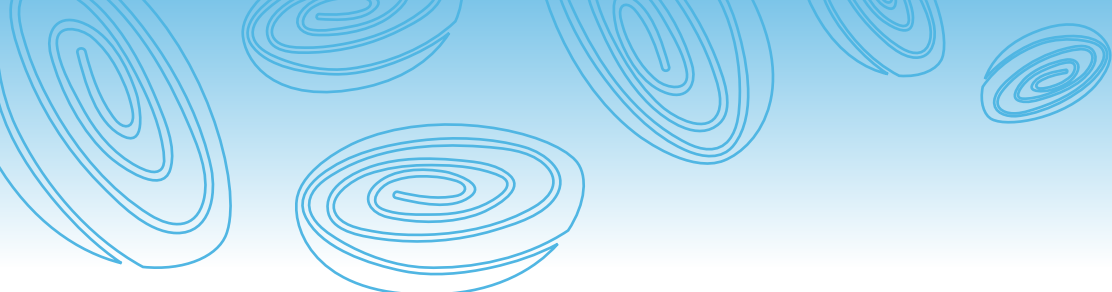
It also helps to avoid screens, bright lights and excitement close to bedtime. What matters most is that bedtimes are calm and relaxed and babies feel comforted. Lots of cuddles before bed can also help.

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Having a bedtime routine is an opportunity to connect with your baby and help them go off to sleep feeling loved and secure.
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How much sleep does my baby need?

The amount of sleep individual babies need varies and will change over time. As they grow and develop they will need less sleep. If you're worried whether your baby is getting enough sleep, a helpful question to ask can be 'Is my baby generally happy, interactive and growing well?' If they are, then don't worry if your baby doesn't seem to need as much sleep as other babies. Every baby has their own unique temperament and sleep needs. If they are generally happy, feeding and growing appropriately they are likely to be getting enough sleep.





Tracking apps

Some parents use apps to track their baby's sleep. While this may be helpful, it can also be misleading as young babies may sleep while feeding. An app can also distract you from 'tuning in' to your baby or have you feeling stressed about updating it. Remember an app can't see your baby - you can. There is no need to use one unless you find it helpful.

Waking through the night

Night time waking should be expected. Babies have short sleep cycles which can cause them to stir and wake more often at night than older children or adults. Because they are growing and developing so rapidly they need to feed overnight and feel close to their caregivers. Night feeding also helps protect against Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Most babies aged 6-12 months will still wake twice during the night, some more, some less. Waking overnight can continue until your child is 2 years old.

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Responding to your baby's needs throughout the day and night will help them feel safe and secure. It will not cause a lasting 'habit'. Think about how you can look after yourself to make night time parenting easier.
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Sleep 'regressions'

Sleep regressions are when your baby starts waking more at night or has shorter naps. These changes are usually associated with developmental milestones. For babies this often causes more frequent night waking and feeding in order to fuel their growing brain. These changes are usually short term and new sleep patterns will emerge after 2-6 weeks.

Your baby's sleep and development

Newborn to 3 months

- Newborns are unaware of night and day so it helps to make these different. Don't minimise household noises during the day, ensure your baby gets lots of natural (not direct) light during the day and darkness at night. Using a 5 minute calm bedtime routine will help them prepare for sleep.
- Newborns have lots of light, active sleep and have very little deep, quiet sleep. They can only stay awake for short periods. Offer feeds and comfort day and night. Babies need to feed often at this age due to very small stomachs and rapid brain growth. They can wake every 2-3 hours to feed, sometimes more.
- Newborns need to be close to parents. They often prefer to be held and usually stop crying when picked up. Try to settle your baby in their bassinet or cot by shushing, patting or placing a gentle warm hand on their tummy. Sometimes they will only want to be held and that's okay.

3 months to 6 months

- Babies are much more alert and responsive at this age. They love to be read to or told stories. They enjoy social interaction so plenty of cuddles and play will help them sleep well.
- By the time they are 3 months old most babies are now more aware of night and day and some (but not all) can sleep for up to 5 hours at a time overnight. Sleep cycles will become longer with more deep, quiet sleep by about 4-6 months.
- Think about what relaxes your baby during playtime. You could use this for wind down times before naps although the nap times may still be random.
- Babies are starting to move and roll. They will practice these skills in light, active sleep and often need help to go back to sleep if they wake.



- Although babies are able to last slightly longer between feeds they still need to feed frequently throughout the day and night.
- Go for a walk in the daylight with your baby. Talk about where you are going and what you see. This helps with night time sleeps.
- A calm bedtime routine can help your baby get ready for sleep. Choose one that works for your family.

6 months to 9 months

- At 5-6 months babies often begin waking more often at night. They are learning many new skills, eg crawling, sitting, babbling and beginning to use words, starting to eat solids.
- Most (but not all) babies at 6 months have 3 daytime naps. Most of their sleep is at night.
- At around 7-10 months they may go through a separation anxiety stage and wake frequently to check if caregivers are nearby to calm and comfort them.
- Call to your baby as you go to them, eg "Mummy's coming".
- About 80% of 6 month-olds will wake for feeds or comfort during the night.
- Continue to use a calm bedtime routine.

9 months

- Babies need lots of active play during the day with opportunities to move around on the floor. Attending playgroups or your local library is great for babies to try new activities and tire themselves.
- Messy play is another great way to tire them while also helping their brain development. Babies love feeding themselves. They enjoy eating meals as a family as they learn to eat new foods.
- At this age babies often have two naps and become more predictable with their sleep and feed patterns.
- Night feeds are still normal although these will usually be spread further apart.
- Continue to use a calm bedtime routine.

12 months

This is an intense period of development for your baby. They are learning words, starting to walk, eating more family foods and teething. Babies like to be able to see and hear familiar people and love favourite songs or stories. Sleep is often disrupted at this age. It can help to:

- feed your baby a varied diet
- make sure they get enough outside time, exercise and play. Provide plenty of opportunities to explore
- give them lots of love and support - it's scary gaining some independence!
- call to your baby as you go to them, eg "Daddy's coming"
- cuddle your baby whenever they want to be held
- have a peaceful, consistent bedtime routine.

Remember a night feed is still common at this age. Most babies have two naps a day.

Supporting your baby's sleep

Sleep Training

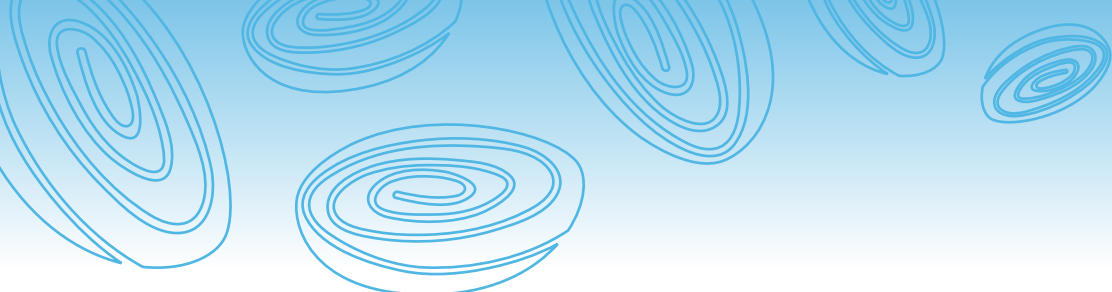
At some point during their baby's life many parents wonder if there is something they could - or should - be doing to 'help' their baby sleep longer, deeper, better, or through the night. Leaving babies to cry themselves to sleep is not recommended because this does not teach them to calm down. It can help to know that often a baby's sleep patterns are normal for their age and stage of development. Don't be afraid to comfort your baby when they are upset. This comfort helps them move through difficult stages more quickly. By working together with your baby you can find a routine that works for everyone.

Making changes to your baby's sleep

Before trying any changes, consider:

- is my baby's sleep a problem for me or do I feel I should change something because of what others are telling me? It's only a problem if it's a problem for you





- is my baby due for a health check? Do they need to be seen by a doctor or CaFHS nurse?
- does their sleep environment help them get to sleep?
- is my baby getting plenty of natural (not direct) daylight?
- do they have a consistent, calming bedtime routine?
- do I know my baby's cues?
- do I have enough support?
- can I improve my own sleep patterns and how I look after myself? It's often easier to change your habits than those of your baby, especially if their sleep is developmentally normal.

If you want to try to make changes to your baby's sleep, very small, slow changes are usually best. Being consistent with these changes will give your baby time to adjust. Changing a baby's sleep patterns can take time, sometimes weeks. Every baby will react differently to change in their sleep.

Listen if your baby is telling you they are not yet ready to change their sleep habits. It's okay to step back and try again at another time. A baby's sleep, along with their growth and development, changes so much in the first year of life.

The baby who will only ever nap in your arms will one day sleep peacefully and confidently alone. Today just may not be that day.

Self-settling

All children learn to sleep longer and eventually through the night when they are developmentally ready. For some babies this happens early. Others are not ready until they are three or four years old. Even when your baby is able to self-settle there will be times when they need extra support, eg when they are unwell, teething or have nightmares.

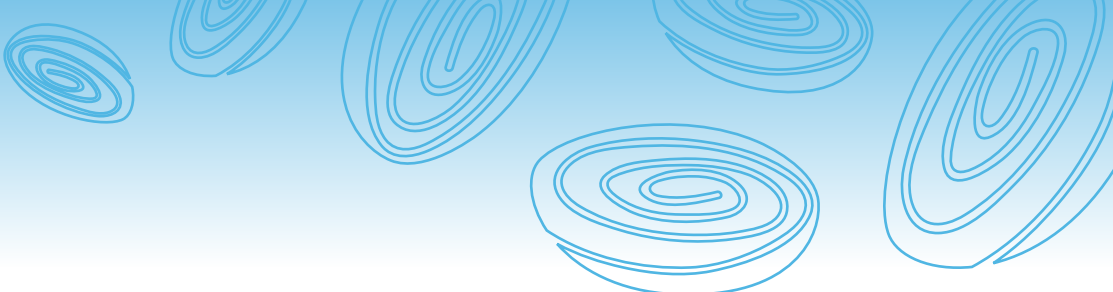


The ability to sleep for longer periods is a developmental milestone that cannot be taught.

Looking after yourself

Sleep disruption can be one of the hardest things to manage and adapt to. Finding ways to look after yourself is important. This could include:

- asking for and accepting help. Say exactly what you need, eg "I'd rather you cook dinner than hold the baby"
- doing things you enjoy
- reaching out for support from other parents, eg a parent group or playgroup. Find people you can talk to openly and honestly. You are not alone
- communicating with your partner if you have one and arrange to take shifts
- going to bed early or resting during the day. Most babies and children have their deepest sleep between 7pm-12am. Using this time to get some sleep will help with the rest of the night
- eating a balanced, healthy diet. See your doctor or health worker if you feel unwell
- getting some fresh air every day. Going for a walk with your baby every morning is great for both of you
- getting help with housework or skip it altogether. Prioritise rest
- maintaining your own good sleep habits - avoid screens, caffeine, alcohol and nicotine near bedtime
- keeping the cot close to your bed so you can rock, pat or shush easily without having to get up
- being kind to yourself. Think about how you would treat a friend in the same situation
- don't focus on other people's negative judgements or assumptions. Avoid comparing yourself or your baby to others - every family is unique and you know your baby better than anyone else
- staying off social media if it's not positive or helpful
- knowing this will pass. Some babies sleep more than others, but they all get there eventually. Be patient, it will get better.



If your baby is crying a lot, it's even more important to look after yourself. An important part of staying calm is the ability to take a break even though this can be difficult to organise. One solution is to set up safe places in your home. A cot is ideal for safely leaving your baby for a few minutes to look after yourself. Stepping away from a crying baby is a hard thing for most parents, but it is important.

It is common to feel dread about the coming evening and night. Try to stay in the moment and not look too far ahead.

When to seek help

Parenting challenges in the first year are common and normal. It's important to seek help if:

- you're worried your baby isn't getting enough sleep. You can talk to a CaFHS nurse or your doctor
- your baby has uncontrolled eczema, allergies, reflux, sensory, breathing or feeding issues. These can all impact sleep and need to be assessed by a health professional
- you're feeling anxious, depressed, helpless, angry or frustrated.

Note: The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children and young people, eg parents, caregivers, step-parents, grandparents, guardians, foster or kinship carers.

Disclaimer: All care has been taken in preparing the information but Red Nose takes no responsibility for its use by other parties or individuals. Red Nose does not accept any liability to any person for the information or advice (or the use of such information or advice). The information is provided on the basis that all persons accessing it undertakes responsibility for assessing the relevance and accuracy of its content. The information was correct at the time of this agreement being made.

Want more information?

Health and wellbeing

Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 364 100

Advice on child health and parenting, including sleep and settling

Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)

Phone 1300 733 606, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri for an appointment with a child health nurse. They can help with sleep and settling for babies and young children
www.cafhs.sa.gov.au

Australian Breastfeeding Association

Phone Helpline 1800 686 268 (mum 2 mum), 24 hours
Information and support for breastfeeding
www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Children's safety

Red Nose

Phone 1300 998 698

Information and brochures on many aspects of safe infant sleeping, including advice on safe sleeping products

Phone Crisis Line 1300 799 656

Phone 1300 308 307, 24 hours for bereavement support

<https://rednose.com.au>

SIDS and Kids SA

Phone 8332 1066

Information on safe sleeping including education sessions for parents, grandparents and professionals. Also offers bereavement support www.sidssa.org

Kidsafe SA

Phone 7089 8554, 9.30am-4pm, Mon-Fri for information about child safety. Located at the Women's and Children's Hospital, North Adelaide

Kidsafe SA - Hilton

Phone 7089 8554, 9am-5pm, Mon-Fri

To hire, check and fit child car restraints, consultations for travelling with additional needs, safety advice, retail space
www.kidsafesa.com.au

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, Product Safety Australia

Information about safe products for babies and children, including safe cots and securing furniture and TVs that can topple over
www.productsafety.gov.au

Support for parents/caregivers

ForWhen Helpline SA

Phone 1300 242 322, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri

Connecting new and expecting parents struggling with their mental health to services that are right for them from conception to 12 months after birth

Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia (PANDA)

Phone Helpline 1300 726 306, 9am-7.30pm, Mon-Fri
Information, support and counselling to new parents, family and friends. You don't need a diagnosis to use this service
www.panda.org.au

Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 224 636, 24 hours

Phone and online support for anyone affected by anxiety or depression. You don't need a diagnosis to call
www.beyondblue.org.au

1800 RESPECT

Phone 1800 737 732, 24 hours

Talk to someone by phone or online about family violence or sexual assault www.1800respect.org.au

Parenting

Raising Children Network

Information about raising children, including sleep and settling
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Parenting SA

For more Parent Easy Guides including 'Sleep: children 0-6 years', 'About babies', 'Bedwetting' and 'Living with toddlers'
www.parenting.sa.gov.au



**Government
of South Australia**

Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department of
Human Services and the Women's and
Children's Health Network.

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended
to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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