

YOUR BABY &  
*SAFE SLEEP*  
DURING THE FIRST  
FEW MONTHS

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After the birth of your baby, one of the biggest adaptations you have to make is to adjust life according to the sleep patterns of your newborn. Most parents expect to have interrupted sleep for a short while, but when this occurs regularly for an extended period, sleep deprivation can take its toll on relationships with partners, family and friends.

You knew that having a baby would change your sleeping routine, but it can be hard to really understand it until you are a new parent. While young babies spend most of their day sleeping (up to 19 hours for some), they sleep for small windows of time. This means that you are also waking up frequently to care for them — and it is exhausting and overwhelming.

From the stress of a baby dealing with reflux or colic, to the pressure we feel to get our babies to sleep through the night, navigating the challenges of baby sleep is tough — really tough.



## *NEWBORN SLEEP EXPLAINED*

Newborns have two sleep states, active sleep (which is similar to adults' REM sleep) and quiet sleep (similar to our non-REM sleep). Studies have shown that active sleep plays a necessary role in preventing Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Fortunately, babies spend more time in active sleep from 2am to 6 am, so during this time, they are much more likely to wake if they are hungry, cold, wet or startled by not breathing rhythmically.

If a child is too cold or too hot, they need to wake to let their parent know. If a child isn't breathing, they need to wake. Anything that forces a child to sleep too deep too soon is dangerous. Active sleep also has other benefits, it is thought to be smart sleep because the brain isn't resting, it increases the blood flow to the brain and is thought to be responsible for more rapid brain growth.

Babies sleep cycles are actually shorter than adults (lasting only 50-60 minutes) and therefore they can experience a partial arousal every hour or so. There is a biological reason for waking: it is for survival. In order for children to grow, they need to eat and therefore need to wake to eat.

## 0-4 MONTHS SLEEP CYCLE

The initial few weeks after birth, babies sleep most of the time, whether it is day or night. However, they wake up often for a feed or because they need their nappies changed. They need 16-18 hours of sleep spread across numerous short naps ranging from 30 minutes to three hours. They may wake up or stir every 35-40 minutes.

However, this timescale varies widely, and some newborns may only sleep for 11 hours while others will sleep for up to 19 hours per day. Newborns may sleep more or less than usual when they are sick or experience a disruption in their regular routines.

As a newborn grows into an infant, they begin to develop a schedule. A newborn's sleeping hours reduce as they grow while the nap times get longer. Eventually, they start sleeping through the night, waking only once or twice for feeds.

Most babies do not have a regular sleep schedule until they are about 6 months old. Even then, there is a significant variation from baby-to-baby. Newborns cannot distinguish between day and night, as in the womb there was no distinction between night and day.

Now it's up to you to help them adjust so they can learn that night time is to sleep and the day is to wake up and play.



## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF A TIRED BABY?

Babies cannot speak, but their behaviour will indicate their needs and wants. You will observe cues like yawning, crying, or the baby becoming fussy or becoming unusually quiet. A sleep-deprived baby can be cranky, and that could also result in sleep-deprived parents. An overtired baby will be difficult to calm down too.

A newborn baby will probably be tired if they have been awake for 1 to 1.5 hours during the day.

There are signs that will tell you when they're ready to sleep.

Avoid stimulating your baby, such as talking loudly or playing with them, if they show the below signs.

### **Some of the sleepy signs are:**

- staring into space
- fussing
- crying
- frowning
- arching back
- jerky arm or legs movements

### **KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER:**

Keeping your baby awake during the day will not help them sleep better at night.

If your baby is overtired it is much harder for them to get to sleep and stay asleep.

## SAFE SLEEP TIPS

As parents become more educated, there is a growing concern to ensure that babies and toddlers sleep safely and that the risk of SIDS is minimized as far as possible.



The American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) lists Safe Sleep Recommendations

The AAP recommends parents follow the safe sleep recommendations below every time they place their baby to sleep for naps or at night time:

- Place your baby on her back to sleep, and monitor her to be sure she doesn't roll over while swaddled.
- Do not have any loose blankets in your baby's cot. A loose blanket, including a swaddling blanket that comes unwrapped, could cover your baby's face and increase the risk of suffocation.
- Your baby is safest in her own cot or bassinet, not in your bed.
- Swaddling can increase the chance your baby will overheat, so avoid letting your baby get too hot. Your baby could be too hot if you notice sweating, damp hair, flushed cheeks, heat rash, and rapid breathing.
- Consider using a dummy for naps and bedtime.
- Place the cot in an area that is always smoke-free.

## HOW TO ENCOURAGE BETTER SLEEP FOR YOUR BABY

You will need to establish a bedtime routine by increasing your interaction with them during the day while they are awake and decreasing their stimulation around night-time so that they learn to calm down and sleep. You will need to help set your baby's sleeping schedule.

During the day, your baby may take 3-4 naps of 30 minutes to three hours divided between the morning and afternoon. Daytime sleep decreases as the baby grows and the gap between naps increase.

Create a suitable environment in their nursery by keeping things dark and quiet at night. If you need lights, make them soft and low. A dimmer switch works well for this. Reduce noise, or use background "white" noise such as a white noise machine or a fan. A fan is also an easy way to reduce the risk of SIDS, due to overheating as a factor.

Use a soft, soothing voice during night feeding and other interactions to give your babies the message that night is the right time to sleep.





### **TO ENCOURAGE YOUR NEWBORN TO SLEEP MORE AT NIGHT RATHER THAN DURING THE DAY:**

- Expose your newborn to light and noise during the daytime
- As evening or bedtime approaches, dim the lights, keep things quiet, and reduce the amount of activity around your baby
- When your baby wakes up at night to feed, keep the room dark and quiet.

### **YOUR BABY'S SLEEPING POSITION**

Always put your baby to sleep on their back with their feet touching the end of the cot. Do not let your baby sleep while lying on their tummy at this age. Babies who sleep on their tummies have a higher risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, known as cot death. You can give your baby some tummy time when they are awake.

- If your baby always lies with their head in the same position, they might develop a 'flat head' which is referred to as plagiocephaly. You can help prevent this when putting your baby down to sleep on their back. When they are lying flat, you can alternate their head position so that sometimes they face left and sometimes they face right.

## AVOID OVERSTIMULATION FOR YOUR BABY.

- Expose your newborn to light and noise during the daytime.
- As evening or bedtime approaches, dim the lights, keep things quiet, and reduce the amount of activity around your baby.
- When your baby wakes up at night to feed, keep the room dark and quiet.

## SWADDLING

The best way to contain your newborn's early reflexes and startles is by swaddling your baby. Swaddling is an ancient method of baby wrapping. For some cultures, babies are wrapped for many months, rarely touching the ground as they are carried in these swaddled positions. Although this may be the extreme, it is important, if not vital that you swaddle your baby at least for sleep.

### Benefits of swaddling

**Sleep:** The evidence is overwhelming that babies who are swaddled sleep longer and better. Swaddling inhibits the immature startle reflexes, which disrupts sleep.

**Calm:** Deep pressure is calming which is why swaddled babies cry significantly less. Swaddling is thus an excellent solution for a colicky baby.

**Feeding:** Difficult feeders, especially those who fight at the breast, tend to feed better with more coordinated sucks and swallows when they are swaddled. (Journal of Human Lactation, 2001.

One of the issues that all parents have when dealing with a newborn is sleep deprivation.

The good thing to know is that while it may be hard in the beginning, it gets easier with time. As the babies get older, their sleep patterns synchronise with their parents, so that everyone at home eventually gets a good night sleep.





## About the author:

After the birth of a baby, one of the biggest adaptations you have to make is to adjust your life according to the patterns of your baby.

Most parents think they only have two options, sleep training or do nothing. I'm here to offer you a different option... Balancing your baby's needs, resulting in better sleep by identifying the root of the problem and teaching age appropriate skills with positive reinforcement NOT tears!



Written for ergoPouch South Africa by Una van Staden, Owner of Pikanini Baby Academy. This guide is for informational purposes only & is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. For expert sleep advice and one-on-one consultations, contact Pikanini Consulting [www.pikanini.co.za](http://www.pikanini.co.za)