

# Your baby's sleep at... 3-6 months

## Your sleeping baby

Sleep is not under our control and cannot be forced.

Here's how it happens:

- On average a 3-6 month old baby will sleep anything from 8-17 hours in 24 hours. By 3 months some babies may sleep up to 5 hours at night-time and by 5 months it could be as much as 8 hours. However, it is unusual for babies to sleep all night every night and it is normal for babies to wake frequently in the night.
- When it gets dark our brains release a hormone called melatonin, which makes us feel drowsy. Your baby's sleep is governed by the sleep cycle (circadian rhythm). The sleep cycle lasts for 45-60 minutes, at the end of which your baby will either start another sleep cycle or wake up (eg if they are hungry, uncomfortable or excited). It is thought that the sleep cycle and arousal from sleep is a protective mechanism against Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- A baby's brain needs lots of energy as it is growing at a very fast rate, so babies need to be fed responsively. It is advised to have your baby in the same room as you (day and night for sleeping) for at least the first 6 months.
- The beginning and end of the sleep cycle is known as active sleep which is characterised by fluttering eyelids, rapid, irregular breathing, grunts or brief cries. At this point, pause to see if your baby will enter another sleep cycle. If you jump in too soon you might find yourself waking a sleeping baby!
- All babies are different and have their own personality – some will sleep longer than others.



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## Recognising sleep cues

- These can vary from baby to baby, but you will begin to recognise your own baby's cues over time. The cues will also change as they grow.
- They may yawn, rub their eyes, pull at their ears, become quieter, or you may notice them frowning, pulling their hair, being less engaged and responsive, a glazed look, drooping eyes, they may want to suck/feed, or arch backwards. However, becoming irritable and beginning to cry are late signs and can lead to your baby becoming over tired.

## What can affect sleep?

- **Environment.** A soothing bedtime and night-time routine is so important to your baby to reduce stress and over stimulation.
- **Sensory stimulation.** Artificial lighting affects sleep as it stimulates your baby's brain, which reduces the effects of melatonin, making it more difficult for your baby to fall asleep.
- **Growth and development.** The excitement of learning new skills such as rolling over and other developmental milestones can affect your baby's sleep pattern. Sometimes parents can mistake these night awakenings for hunger and want to wean baby early, but this doesn't help your baby to sleep through.

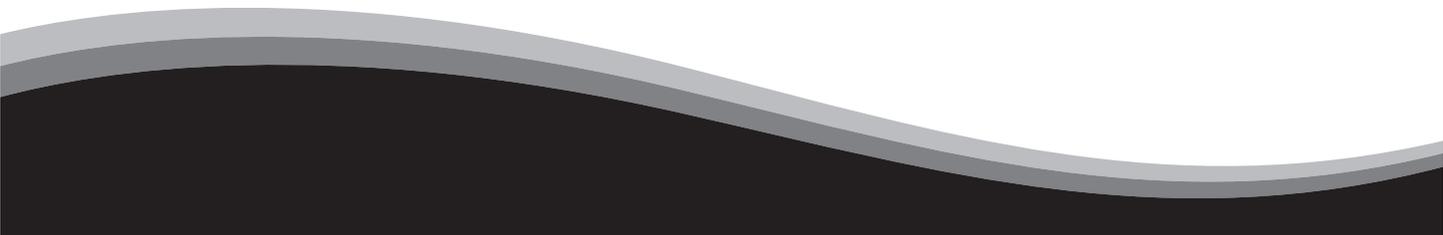
Between 3 and 6 months babies become aware of their own feelings and are starting to form strong emotional attachments to you eg they can get upset when they wake at night and you're not there. This is a normal and part of their development.

You will be continuing to get to know your baby as they are developing at a fast rate. You may notice them waking more frequently for feeds and this be a growth spurt, which usually last for a few days.

Your baby will want to be close to you day and night, you cannot spoil your baby with love, cuddles and attention. Keeping your baby close releases oxytocin, known as 'the love hormone', in both you and your baby, making you both feel relaxed and calm. Studies suggest that babies who are held, have all their needs met and are not left to cry for long periods, will cry less, be more settled and become more confident toddlers and children.

- **Minor ailments and teething.** These can both interfere with sleep.

## Your baby's development

- At 3-4 months your baby will have an awareness of being in the world. They will not yet understand that you are a separate person, but will know that when you meet their needs it makes them feel safe and happy.
  - Physical strength develops, and at 4 months they will be interested in their surroundings, grasping at objects, and looking at their hands. By 4-6 months they will be rolling over and showing enjoyment by laughing and kicking their legs.
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- At 3-6 months there will be further leaps in brain development, and the beginning of language with babbling and cooing. What a lot is going on! Imagine how exhausting, exciting and at times frustrating this time is for your baby.

## **Ideas to support you and your baby**

- **Environment.** A consistent day and night-time routine could help your baby tune into their natural body clock. Getting up at the same time each day is recommended – if your baby is still asleep, treat it like a daytime nap, open the curtains, let some fresh air in if the weather is appropriate and carry on with your normal day. During the daytime your baby will benefit from lots of stimulation and exposure to sunlight, so take them out, do lots of interesting things that you can both enjoy eg a walk in the park, or activities at your local library and children's centre. Your baby may respond well to a consistent bedtime routine, such as having a bath, dimming the lights, darkening the room and reducing overhead lighting. You may also want to consider black out curtains or thicker curtains in your baby's room during the summer months.
- **Practical ideas.** It may help to bring your baby's bedtime closer to your own, as some babies do better when they go to bed later. Make sure your baby is getting the right social cues about day and night. If they get lots of stimulation before bedtime this may make it harder to learn that bedtime is for sleeping. Some relaxing activities for your baby and you before bedtime include cuddling, feeding, being carried while walking, skin to skin and having a bath. Babies like to look at books from an early age so you may like to make this part of your bedtime routine.

**For further support or information please contact your health visiting team.**

### **Useful websites**

Caring for your baby at night - a guide for parents, Off to the best start and Guide to bottle feeding

[www.unicef.org.uk](http://www.unicef.org.uk)

Infant sleep information source

[www.isisonline.org.uk](http://www.isisonline.org.uk)

If you would like this information in another format, please contact the Your Experience Team on freephone 0800 694 5530. Alternatively you can email [wcnt.yourexp@nhs.net](mailto:wcnt.yourexp@nhs.net)

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