

Newborn Care: Sleeping

During the first few weeks of life, your baby will sleep a lot – usually about 16 to 17 hours a day. Sleep helps their brain develop. But newborns sleep lightly and eat often, so they may only sleep one to two hours at a time.

Your newborn does not yet know the difference between night and day. As a result, your baby's sleeping pattern will be unpredictable. It will be hard to make your baby sleep more, less, or at certain times.

Since your newborn is feeding every 2 to 3 hours, you both will be awakened often in the middle of the night. But at around 2 weeks, you can help your baby start to recognize when it is time for sleep.

You can create a sleep routine. Here's how: During the day, play with your baby more. Spend time talking, reading, and playing together.

Keep the lights on or open the curtains or blinds. You also do not need to be completely quiet. Ordinary noises and activities can encourage your baby to be more awake during the day.

At night, designate your baby's awake time for feeding only; no playtime. Keep the lights low and calming even when feeding or changing your baby.

And although you are tired too, do not fall asleep with your baby after a feeding. Put your baby back in a crib or bassinet to sleep safely.

To review, try not to wake your baby when you feed or change them at night. Put your baby to bed when they are sleepy. This will help them learn to fall asleep on their own, in their own bed. If you hold your baby or rock them to sleep, it may be hard for them to go back to sleep if they wake up.

The safest sleeping position is on their back. Healthy babies should not sleep on their stomachs. Do not buy a sleep positioner. Most are unsafe and not needed.

If your newborn has had problems with breathing or other problems, check with your child's healthcare provider about the safest sleeping position.

Because your baby is spending so much time lying in one position while sleeping, the back or side of their head may look flat.

Switch head positions when putting your baby to bed and give them lots of "tummy time" when being watched awake. This is good for the head and also encourages upper body strength.

When your baby lies down to sleep, use this time to rest yourself. You deserve it.

It may seem never-ending, but this period of unpredictable sleep patterns will soon fade away. As babies get older, they begin to sleep for longer stretches of time.

For now, though, get rest when you can so you can enjoy the times when your baby is awake.