

## **HELPING NEWBORNS SLEEP WELL**

There are many different philosophies – and many different books – that discuss infant sleep. We hope that the following information will be helpful to all parents, regardless of the way you choose to parent and care for your new baby.

1. Babies are “noisy” sleepers. They have more active sleep than older children and adults, so they often make noises while sleeping. If you respond to each little noise, you will actually be waking your baby up from sleep.
2. Even the babies who are sleeping “all night” are actually waking up approximately every two hours. They have just learned to comfort themselves and go back to sleep.
3. You can help your baby learn the difference between daytime and nighttime.
  - a. Make nighntimes very quiet and dark. Try not to talk or sing to your baby when she wakes up in the middle of the night, so she will learn that nighttime is “business only” and just for feeding.
  - b. You can even eliminate one diaper change in the middle of the night so you do not wake your baby up by changing his diaper. If you decide to skip a diaper change, you may want to put some thick diaper cream on your baby’s bottom earlier in the evening to help protect his skin.
  - c. Consider beginning a little “nighttime routine” that helps your baby learn the difference between sleeping in the day time and sleeping at night. Try to do the same thing every night at approximately the same time in preparation for sleep. A soft song, a gentle skin massage, a warm bath – these can all help your baby learn that nighttime is coming.
4. Parents often think they should keep their newborn babies awake during the daytime to help them sleep better at night. Actually babies who sleep better in the day time are learning how to lengthen the intervals between feedings – and, so, they sleep better at night. “Sleep begets sleep” is the phrase some people use to remind parents that babies need to be sleeping – day and night.
5. You may have noticed that newborn babies sleep better when they are being held. Do not be afraid to let someone hold your baby so both of you can sleep better and longer. You will not be teaching your baby bad sleep “habits”. Rather, your baby will be learning she can stretch out her sleep without needing to wake for feeding. Holding a sleeping baby is a great “job” for grandparents and other relatives – and then parents can sleep better, too.
6. Babies who stay awake too long can easily become overly stimulated and often become “wired”. They have a difficult time falling asleep once they are overly tired. As adults we easily fall asleep if we are very tired, but infants often do the opposite. They look wide awake – but act fussy, because they are too tired. To help prevent this situation, consider providing your baby with the opportunity to fall asleep in a quiet, dark place, if he has been awake for more than 15 – 20 minutes.

Remember, these are only suggestions. You and your baby are getting to know each other – and you will know your baby better than anyone else.

Used with permission: Jane E. Anderson, M.D. “Prescriptions for Parents”