

# Sleep: babies and toddlers



**TOP TEN TIPS**  
for parents and families

## This table is a rough guide of sleeping patterns up to the age of 3.

Age	Sleep needed per day
Newborn to 3 months	15 hours new babies are likely to need 3 naps during the day
3 to 6 months	14½ hours including 2 naps a day
6 to 9 months	14 hours including 2 naps a day
9 to 18 months	13½ hours including 1 to 2 naps a day
18 months to 2 years	13 hours including 1 nap a day
3 years	12 hours may still have short nap or catch up every few days

## Sleep

Sleep is just as important as food and exercise – we all need to get enough, but it's especially important in the first years of life. What counts as enough varies from one person to the next, and babies and children are just the same. The important thing is that sleeping is in a pattern that suits your baby. We have based these tips on information from professionals and parents. All babies are different and you should do what works for you and your baby.

## Stay close

For the first six months, your baby should sleep in the same room as you. For safety reasons, you should place your baby on their back, in a cot in the room with you.



Do not overheat your baby or expose them to cigarette smoke.

## Treat day and night separately

When babies are born they do not know day from night. Over time they learn to sleep more at night and less during the day, so it helps to separate day and night from the start. During the day, open curtains, keep it light and bright, play with your child and don't try to shut out everyday noises when they are asleep. At night, keep lights and noise levels low.



## Try to stick to bedtime and morning routines

Babies and children like things to be calm and predictable. You may be able to get them into a bedtime routine quite early on. Try to do the same things in the same order: bath and change for bed; brush teeth; bed; read a story; kiss goodnight and dim the lights. Getting your child up at the same time every morning may help to 'set' their body clock.



## Quiet time before bedtime

Let your child know when bedtime is coming up. Remember, your child may not seem sleepy – being hyperactive and irritable can mean they're tired too. Have some quiet time before bedtime, for example looking at books, singing or playing a quiet game. A bath is good for relaxing them. After the bath, it can help to go straight to the bedroom.



## Help your child to learn to settle themselves

Sometimes it's difficult to get to sleep – this is as true for babies as it is for adults. At first, babies may go to sleep being rocked or fed. However, babies will develop their own sleeping patterns and will start to sleep for longer over time. It is important that bedtime is not a battle; your baby needs to feel safe, secure and comfortable to get to sleep on their own.



## Stimulation

Lights from the TV and other screens affect the hormone which brings on sleep (melatonin).

Playing with iPads, mobile phones or other backlit devices will keep children awake.



So it helps to switch off the TV, computer or other screens in the hour before bedtime.

## Settle your child down to sleep

Read or sing to your child in bed to help them settle, then say goodnight. Dim or turn off the light and let your child settle themselves.



When you leave the room your child may cry. Go back and talk to them quietly, comfort them - they may just need a cuddle. Put them back to bed and leave them to settle by themselves.

## During the night

Some babies may sleep through the night at 6 months while others will still wake up, all



babies are different. If they cry while they're settling or wake up at night keep things low key. Comfort any distress. Limit doing anything that will keep them interested and awake. If your child gets out of bed, calmly take them back to bed with no discussion.

## Try a sleep diary

If you are having difficulty getting your child to sleep it may be useful to



keep a sleep diary. But remember, there is a big difference in the sleeping patterns of babies under 6 months and older children. Try not to focus on the lack of sleep and have realistic expectations. Babies are all different, but generally will sleep better if they feel safe, secure and comfortable.

## Look after yourself

Remember, all parents and carers will have some interrupted sleep when their children are young. Get a break if you can – if your child has a nap, take the chance to have a rest.



Easy to say, hard to do! Do not be afraid to ask for help from family and friends. If you are worried or need extra advice, talk to your health visitor.

## Where to find help:

### Contact

**0808 808 3555**

Offers information, advice and support to parents and carers of children with any special need or disability.

**[www.contact.org.uk](http://www.contact.org.uk)**

### Enquire

**0345 123 2303**

Practical advice and information about education and additional support for learning in Scotland.

**[www.enquire.org.uk](http://www.enquire.org.uk)**

### Families Outside

**0800 254 0088**

Support and information helpline offers help and support to prisoners' families.

**[www.familiesoutside.org.uk](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk)**

## **Lone Parent Helpline**

**0808 801 0323**

The Lone Parent Helpline provides support and advice on anything from dealing with a break-up, moving into work or sorting out maintenance, benefit or tax credit issues.

**[www.opfs.org.uk](http://www.opfs.org.uk)**

## **Parenting across Scotland**

You can access free parent resources, support networks and parent helplines on a range of topics.

**[www.parentingacrossscotland.org](http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org)**

## **ParentLine Scotland**

**0800 028 2233**

For any parent or carer in Scotland who needs information, support or guidance or simply someone to talk to.

**[www.children1st.org.uk/help-for-families/parentline-scotland/](http://www.children1st.org.uk/help-for-families/parentline-scotland/)**

## **Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs**

**08080 10 10 11**

Provides support and advice to anyone concerned about someone else's alcohol or drug use.

**[www.sfad.org.uk](http://www.sfad.org.uk)**

## **Sleep Scotland**

**0800 138 6565**

Sleep Scotland's free sleep support line provides on-the-spot guidance to parents and guardians struggling with their children's and teenagers' sleep problems.

**[www.sleepscotland.org](http://www.sleepscotland.org)**

## **Young Minds**

**0808 802 5544 parents' helpline**

Information on child and adolescent mental health. Services for parents and professionals.

**[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)**

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**[www.parentingacrossscotland.org](http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org)**

**[www.sleepscotland.org](http://www.sleepscotland.org)**



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