

Older babies

Quick facts

Young babies need a lot of sleep, but their sleep patterns do change, and every baby is different. On average a baby will sleep for 16-18 hours a day in the first 4 months and from 12-16 hours in the first year but of course they will get hungry and wake every few hours for a feed or a nappy change. Going without sleep is one of the biggest challenges for a parent and establishing a sleep routine isn't always easy.

What is sleep?

Sleep is divided into two different states which alternate through the night: Dream Sleep sometimes referred to as REM (rapid eye movement) and Deep Sleep. As we pass from one state to the other, we often wake, roll over and go back to sleep, totally unaware that we have woken at all. This is because we have sleep clues – dark room, comfy bed, etc. A baby needs to become familiar with his sleep clues. If these sleep clues are being breastfed, rocked to sleep or a dummy, he will sometimes need these clues again when he wakes at night. You can teach him new clues which will enable him to fall asleep on his own.

Establishing a routine.

Between the ages of three and six months a routine will often start to emerge, ideally your baby will sleep more at night than during the day.

Don't worry if this doesn't happen exactly on time. Note down feed and sleep times and you may see a pattern emerging.

Try to keep to the same bedtime and a simple routine of perhaps a bath, a quiet feed and a cuddle.

Checklist for a baby 3-6 months.

Put baby down awake on their back and allow them to try and settle themselves. Many babies cry for a short period before sleep but then wind down and settle.

Babies will often wake for a night feed, that is perfectly natural.

Try and keep the feed as low key as possible – no loud noises, keep lighting low. This will help baby to distinguish between night and day.

Make sure baby is comfortable, well fed and nappy changed.

Check baby is not too hot or cold and adjust clothing as appropriate. It is important baby does not become overheated. Feel their chest or back of neck. Advice on safe sleep temperature available here: <https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/safer-sleep-advice/safer-sleep-basics/baby-room-temperature/>

Keep the room dark or with just a night light so that you can safely move around.

Some babies like soothing music played, others white noise.

Sleep Routines/Training

Sleep training is not for everyone but due to family circumstances, some parents feel it may be best for them and their baby.

It needs patience and consistency to be successful.

Details of the Checking Routine and the Gradual Retreat are available on our *In Depth Guide for Older Babies*. If you decide you would like to use the routines, our volunteers will be happy to offer advice and support while you get the routine established.

Points to remember if you decide on sleep training

Make sure baby has no health problems before you start and if you are in doubt consult your G.P. or Health Visitor to discuss the routine.

Consistency is very important and reassuring for baby.

It's unlikely the routine will work in the first few days although you may see some improvement. Take your time, baby has to get used to the new routine.

Try and keep good day time naps going if possible, so that baby is not overtired at bedtime.

If baby becomes ill during the routine, stop and do whatever is necessary until baby recovers and then go back to the routine.

If you have support available during the day so that you can take a break, it can make it easier for you to manage the evenings until they improve.