



x SafeSleepSpace^{SSS}

Baby, sleep & the *fourth trimester*

BIRTH — 4 MONTHS

EARLY YEARS SLEEP GUIDE SERIES: ONE



From birth to 4 months old, your baby’s sleep pattern will vary greatly. It’s perfectly normal for your new baby to have many unsettled periods during the day, because not only does a newborn need to feed regularly around the 24 hour clock, but they are also adjusting to life outside the womb.

It’s really important to help and support them through this huge transition and give them lots of loving cuddles to support the development of their brain.



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Safe sleeping and key messages

It is essential that babies and toddlers sleep safely at all times and that the research-based guidelines are followed.

In Australia, **Red Nose** makes six key recommendations to sleep baby safely and reduce the risk of sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI). These recommendations are:

1. Sleep baby on the back from birth, not on their tummy or side
2. Sleep baby with head and face uncovered
3. Keep baby smoke free before birth and after
4. Provide a safe sleeping environment night and day
5. Sleep baby in their own safe sleeping place in the same room as an adult caregiver for the first six to 12 months
6. Breastfeed baby

Key also at this age is:

7. Cease swaddling once baby commences first signs of rolling or when the startle reflex disappears (which is usually around 8–10 weeks) and transition to an arms out age appropriate sleeping bag
8. Move baby from a bassinet to a cot once baby is rolling or the bassinet becomes too small
9. No pillows, soft toys or loose blankets in the cot or bassinet
10. Make sure the mattress is firm, clean and flat, in a safe cot that meets industry standard
11. Choose a suitable TOG-rated pouch and pyjamas to prevent overheating

You can find a detail Safe Sleep Space safe sleeping checklist [here](#) or visit the [Red Nose website](#).





How much sleep?

On average, young babies sleep for about 16–17 hours a day spread over several periods ranging from less than an hour to several hours.

Not only does your baby need to wake frequently to feed, until their brain matures and the hormones that drive sleep and wakefulness reach sufficient levels, very few babies settle into a pattern of shorter sleeps during the day and longer sleeps at night until they are much older.

In the early weeks these sleep periods can change from day to day, so do your best to go with the flow. You'll also learn quickly to read your baby's cues, tired signs and cries.

Tired signs

Key is to watch the baby not the clock!

It's important to look and listen for signs that your baby is tired rather than watching the clock. If your baby is showing signs they are tired — even if they have only been awake a short time — they are tired and need to go to sleep.

Babies settle to sleep better if they are not overtired; so to avoid this you watch for the subtle or early tired signs such as:

- Glazed eyes or long blank stares
- Redness around the eyes and eyebrows
- Jerky movements
- Clenched fists or tense extended arms or legs
- Hiccoughs
- Some babies may look at you briefly but then turn their head and look away. This cue can often be misread as a sign they want to engage.

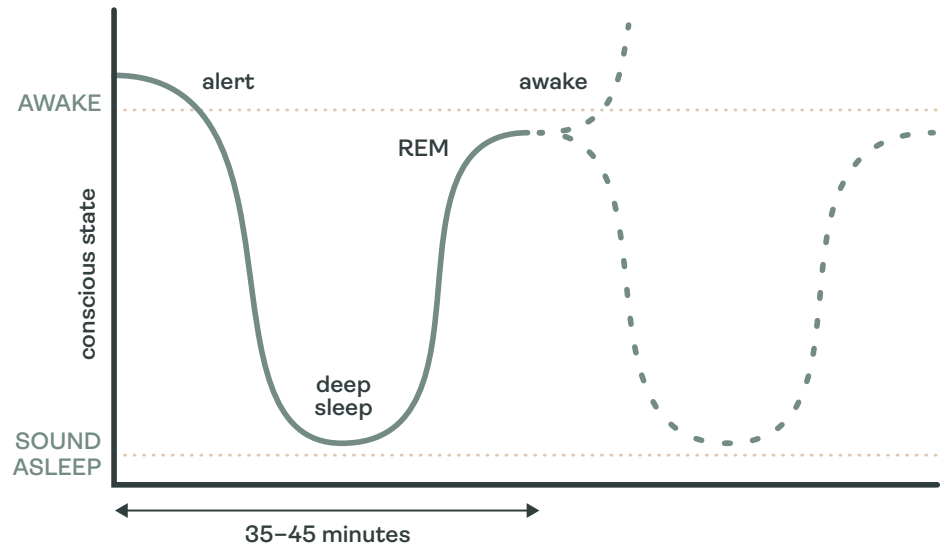
As young babies can become overtired very quickly and are then more difficult to settle try to avoid waiting for these late tired cues:

- Squirming vigorously
- Yawning
- Crying

What does a baby sleep cycle look like?

From birth, sleep cycles normally vary in length from 20 to 35 minutes. As your baby matures, the average baby sleep cycle will begin to extend to around 30 to 45 minutes.

It's really normal for some babies to have trouble moving from one sleep cycle to the next without the need for assistance. But just like the process of helping them drift to sleep, with parental support, over time (and with maturity), they will eventually manage to thread together multiple sleep cycles.



Decoding baby cries

Crying is the way babies communicate with us and requires us to respond

Babies exhibit four types of cries. They can:

- Grizzle
- Fuss
- Vocalize
- Cry forcefully

A more demanding, forceful cry from a baby is designed to make you respond quicker than a low level whinge.

Knowing the types of cries a baby gives us and responding is key to helping your infant settle to sleep



Why is my baby unsettled?

- We know that most babies go through a peak of unsettledness between the ages of 6–12 weeks. This will improve; but stay closely connected with your Health Nurse/Health professional for guidance.
- Growth spurts, both emotional and physical, occur around 6 weeks and 12 weeks and your baby may become unsettled.
- Overtired babies often cry quite loudly. Missing their early tired signs can lead to overtiredness.
- Understanding your baby's temperament and your parenting philosophy will determine how you settle your baby; there is no one size fits all approach!
- Being hungry, feeling uncomfortable with a wet or dirty nappy.
- Infants waking at night to feed is biologically normal, and it may be several months before sleep consolidates into longer and more settled periods.
- Being unwell can also cause sleep disturbances.

If you suspect there is something wrong; always have your baby checked for any medical concerns by a doctor or health professional.

Helping your young baby to settle

Sleep is a learnt skill requiring developmental readiness. Newborns and young babies generally do not have regular patterns but will feed/sleep around the 24 hr clock.

Settling strategies are also generally not encouraged until your baby is at least 10 weeks of age. Once your baby reaches this age ensuring that your baby is not hungry or in need of a feed, then it may be time to try using the following steps to settle your baby.

1. Start by quietening the environment. A darkened (not pitch black) room can help baby calm and relax, as can music or white noise.
2. Offer your baby a massage or a cuddle.
3. Most young babies enjoy being swaddled. Once your baby loses their startle reflex — at around 8–10 weeks; it's important to transition them to a safe, wearable sleeping bag. *If your baby has never been swaddled from birth it is also advised to never introduce swaddling as this may increase the risk of SUDI*
4. An older baby of 3–4 months may respond well to a gentle sleep time pattern. This might be as simple as putting them into an age appropriate sleeping bag followed by a cuddle.
5. If your baby cries during this preparation stage that's OK and perfectly normal — it's their way of anticipating and preparing for sleep. Take a few deep breaths with your baby, hold them close and gently rock them in an upright position. The upright cuddle lessens the expectation of being fed to sleep.
6. Once your baby is calm in your arms (not asleep), gently place them into their bassinet or cot.
7. If they remain calm, slowly move away and give them the opportunity to drift to sleep.
8. Once out of eyesight from your baby, wait and listen. If they are grizzling or fussing, give them the chance to “nest” and get comfortable on their own.
9. If your baby cries out wait and listen to see if the cry tapers off. If it does, respect their space and let them continue to manage on their own.
10. A loud forceful cry that continues for more than 3 cry outs means they are not managing on their own and need your help. If that's the case, start by comforting them with some shushing which recreates the womb environment.
11. If they calm, continue for about 5 seconds or so then move away and give them a chance to drift off to sleep.
12. If your baby requires more comforting try stroking their head and gently patting the mattress — this sound mimics mum's heartbeat. If they respond by calming, continue for 5 seconds or so then move away and give them the opportunity to go to sleep on their own.
13. If they are not responding to the stroking and mattress patting, try placing your hand on baby's chest and gently rock babe back and forth.
14. If after about 5 seconds or so your baby is still not calming, this may be the time to offer a dummy if they use one. Use the dummy as a comforter, as a part of the settling process.
15. If your baby has no dummy and is still not calming after offering around 5 seconds of each of these settling strategies, it's time to pick your baby up and offer an upright cuddle to calm them.
16. Once in your arms this is a great opportunity to assess your baby. If they snuggle in, calm and recover quickly and if you're comfortable, you may like to try the entire process again. If they push away and take a bit longer to calm in your arms, this is your cue to end the experience and use your go-to tool to settle babe to sleep. This might be rocking or feeding or taking them for a walk in the pram.



Key things to remember...

- Distressed babies need comforting until they mature and develop the skill of self-regulation, so you are never spoiling a baby when you are comforting them, rather, you are helping them learn to calm.
- Infants waking at night to feed is biologically normal, and it may be many, many months before sleep consolidates into longer and more settled periods.
- If the going gets tough, reach out to your health professionals and supports for help.
- Take time to just be with your baby, to look, wonder and be amazed at the incredible family you are, together!



Products you might like to try...



Cocoon Swaddle Bag

Unlike traditional swaddles, this zip-up swaddle is both easy to use and difficult to escape from. It's TOG rated for warmth to keep baby snug and securely swaddled without the need for complicated wrapping from day one. Featuring press studs on the arm holes, it can be converted into a sleeping bag. Suitable for ages 0–12M.



Long Sleeve Layer

Made from a deliciously soft, stretchy organic jersey cotton, these are comfortable and warm during sleep. The slim-fit design prevents bunching underneath your child's pouch, and the breathable, natural fibres help regulate body temperature and prevent overheating. Suitable for ages 0–24M.



Butterfly Cardi

Innovatively designed to be a transition aid worn over your baby's swaddle or sleeping bag, the Butterfly Cardi helps them transition to arms-out with minimal sleep interruptions and maximum sleep comfort. Suitable for ages 2–6M.



Hip Harness Cocoon Swaddle Bag

If your baby has been diagnosed with Hip Dysplasia, we have a swaddle for you too. Based on our Cocoon Swaddle Bag, it features an ultra-wide bell-shaped bottom to accommodate a range of hip harnesses and braces. Suitable for ages 3–12M.

Next up... Our 4–8 Month Guide will be released on 31/3/2021

Written for ergoPouch by Cindy Davenport, Clinical Director [Safe Sleep Space](#). This content is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. If all you think about all day is baby sleep or the struggles of parenting, then it is definitely time to chat about it. Our telephone consultation service is very popular and produces amazing results. Our calls are delivered by qualified health professionals who can offer recommendations to help address your sleep and settling concerns. Phone consultations are available Australia wide or internationally via phone or Skype. [Book online now](#) or call us on 1300 775 337.