

Steps for settling your baby



Centre for Community Child Health

November 2015



Your baby's tired signs

Become familiar with your baby's tired signs. Many babies follow this pattern in the first three months of life:

- After daytime feeds, your baby will usually be happy. This 'happy-awake-time' is less than 15 minutes in the first few weeks and 60 to 90 minutes by three months.
- When your baby starts to grizzle or cry, it's bedtime.

Other tired signs in babies in the first three months include:

- jerking arms or legs
- yawning
- frowning
- arching back
- staring
- stiffness.

If your baby is older than four months, you might also see them rub their eyes when they're tired.

It is important to learn to read your baby's tired signs and to respond by doing some activities (a warm bath, a story) that help your baby to wind down, and then putting them down to sleep. If your baby is overtired then sleep becomes more difficult.

1. Be alert to your baby's tired signs (overtired babies are very hard to settle).
2. Take your baby into their bedroom.
3. Darken the bedroom (during day and night) and minimise interaction to prepare your baby for sleep.
4. Wrap your baby and/or provide a dummy.
5. Cuddle your baby and put them into the cot/bassinette quiet but still awake.
6. If your baby grizzles or is quiet, you should leave the room. Give your baby the opportunity to settle on their own. Some babies will grizzle themselves to sleep.
7. If your baby starts to cry, stay to settle them in the cot (stroking, gentle patting) until your baby is quiet but not asleep.
8. Leave the room.

You might need to repeat this process several times.

Learn more about your baby's sleep



Centre for Community Child Health

November 2015



Baby sleep cycles

Over the course of one night (or day), your baby will repeatedly cycle from light to deep sleep. In very young babies this cycle of light to deep sleep occurs every 20 or so minutes. In older babies it might take 30 to 50 minutes.

The way your baby goes to sleep at the start of the night (and the start of daytime naps) is the way they will expect to go back to sleep overnight. If the last thing your baby remembers is being rocked or fed to sleep at the start of the night, they are going to want to be rocked or fed back to sleep when they wake overnight!

Sleep cues: parent dependent and independent

Babies rely on different cues to help them go to sleep. Adults do too – perhaps you have a preferred pillow or lie in a certain position to fall asleep?

All babies develop their own set of sleep cues and you play a big role in determining what these will be. **Parent-dependent** cues to get babies to fall asleep include:

- rocking
- walking in a pram
- feeding
- driving around the block in a car.

Babies learn to rely on these cues to fall back to sleep when they wake during the night.

With **parent-independent** sleep cues, you can help your baby learn to fall asleep without your help. If your baby can fall asleep at the start of the night without direct help from you, your baby will be more likely to re-settle during the night without crying, and will only tend to cry out during the night if they are hungry or uncomfortable.

Parent-independent sleep cues can include:

- a dark and quiet room away from the television and other children
- the same sleep place for both day and night whenever possible
- wrapping/swaddling or tucking your baby into their cot in the same way for every sleep
- patting or gently stroking your baby until they're drowsy but not asleep.

If your baby falls asleep with parent-independent sleep cues and wakes between sleep cycles, they will see that everything is in its usual place (darkened room, quiet, still swaddled) and are likely to fall back to sleep without calling out.