

Unlike in many other parts of the world, there's a lot of social pressure in North America for babies to sleep through the night as soon as possible. However, sleep can't be controlled, it can only be encouraged.

To help children stay calm at night, they need to realize that there are differences between night and day. At night, there should be less noise, less light and less stimulation.

Bedtime

To help your child fall asleep, you should always put them to bed at the same time and follow a similar ritual from one evening to the next, such as reading a storybook. Quiet activities before bedtime also promote sleep. To fall asleep properly, children should be neither too tired nor too stimulated. If you want your baby to fall back to sleep on their own at night, they need to get used to falling asleep on their own in their crib, without a bottle. If you like to rock your baby, you should put them to bed before they fall asleep in your arms. For example, after putting them to bed, you can sing them a lullaby then gently stroke their head and kiss them goodnight on the cheek. Then, you leave the room. Giving your baby a comfort object such as a stuffed animal, doll or blanket at bedtime can help ease the separation process.

If they cry, wait a few minutes before going back in, then go to their crib and tell them it's alright, you're there. If necessary, you can sit on a chair next to the crib for a minute, then say goodnight again and leave the room. If the child is still crying a few minutes later, repeat the process until they fall asleep. Every few days, move the chair farther from the crib. Keep doing this until the chair is out of the room. This method usually works well if you stick with it.

Nighttime wakefulness

While only 25% of babies sleep through the night (5 hours in a row) at 2 months, this figure climbs to 70% at 4 months. As a result, most babies can do without night feedings from 4 months onwards. However, one in five babies will continue to wake up at night until they're a year old and beyond. Some children who used to sleep through the night will start waking up again after 6 months due to a developmental stage called separation anxiety.

Four-month-old babies can be sensitive to changes in routine. Predictable routines help put them at ease so they can rest peacefully. To promote good sleep habits:

- ✓ Make sure your child has a proper sleep environment (dry diaper, comfortable clothes, appropriate blankets, room temperature around 20°C [68°F] and low noise and light levels).
- ✓ Avoid exciting or stimulating your baby just before bedtime.
- ✓ Have them drink before bed, but don't let them fall asleep with a bottle (risk of ear infection and cavities if they have teeth).
- ✓ Establish a rewarding and relaxing routine for your baby, like reading a short story in dim light before cuddles and sleep.
- ✓ Put them to bed at the same time every night.
- ✓ After putting them to bed, stay in the bedroom with them for a bit.

Your child must learn that there's a difference between night and day. It's important not to stimulate them at night. There are many ways to approach bedtime—the key is finding a routine that works for you and your child. Remember that babies become accustomed to bedtime rituals and routines, whether at night or in the day. If you rock your child to sleep in your arms, they'll probably want to go back to sleep the same way if they wake up in the night. If you haven't reduced the number of night feedings, your baby may keep asking for more.

If you really want your baby to sleep through the night, they need to get used to falling asleep on their own. If they're waking up at night, make sure they're not sick, they're comfortable and put them back to bed after changing their diaper if necessary. Once they learn to fall asleep on their own at bedtime, they'll be able to get back to sleep when they wake up at night as well.