

Newborn and infant sleep

By Dr Byrdie Johnston

Good sleepers aren't just by luck! Yes, some babies do naturally fall into a beautiful routine and sleep wonderfully without the parents having to think about it; but these babies are the rarity.

If you don't think about a routine, you won't have one.

Where to start:

-**"Babywise" by Gary Ezzo.** If you feel confused, don't worry, as it took me until my second baby to really grasp what he was saying. I found the question and answer section at the back useful

"Oh Baby" by Kathy Fray A really enjoyable read; and there is even a special chapter for the blokes!

Other good books:

- anything by Nigel Latta

- "Babyproofing your marriage" by Stacie Cockrell, Cathy O'Neill, Julia Stone

The Quick Start Guide:

Important concepts:

- 1. Newborns NEED LOTS OF SLEEP**
- 2. Aim for a 3 hour feed cycle (1 hr feed, 2 hr sleep). NO PLAYTIME**
- 3. Rush slowly if newborn is safe and supposed to be asleep**
- 4. A good day sleeper is a good night sleeper**
- 5. Break the rules sometimes for your own sanity but not often enough to create bad habits**

Newborns NEED LOTS OF SLEEP

A newborn is doing so much growing and developing they literally are awake just to feed. There is no playtime at this age (I would say going up as far as 3 months old; or even a bit older). One of the biggest mistakes I think parents make is keeping their baby out of bed for cuddles/walks/ 'tummytime'/cafes. All the baby wants to do is sleep (and eat) and they should be sleeping in their bed. I think expecting them to sleep upright in a front back is not fair (on them). And they aren't supposed to be in carseats/capsules for hours either.

Aim for a 3 hour feed cycle (1 hr feed, 2 hr sleep). NO PLAYTIME

Feed, Play, Sleep. Feed, Play, Sleep.

Your day starts when your newborn wakes (or you can wake the newborn if you prefer to start at a specified time). Check the time and note it. The clock starts ticking from this moment. Feed for **MAXIMUM ONE HOUR**. Marathon feeds that last more than an hour are unhelpful to you and

unhelpful to baby. By 60 minutes baby is unlikely to be doing any feeding; is just doing non-nutritive sucking. For my first, she was a small baby and fed for 60 minutes each feed; for quite a few weeks. My next two babies were finished by 30 minutes; probably because my milk supply came in faster (makes sense). If you are having problems with supply (baby not gaining weight) and have to do top-ups, I would suggest try to have the breastfeed AND topup completed within that 1 hour. (use formula if needed for rapid topup rather than express; express after baby is back in bed ready for the next feed). Some people do an exhausting 1 hr breastfeed followed by 30 min pump followed by 30 min bottle feed which means baby is up for 2 hrs each feed. A quick note on breastfeeding: my recommendation is feed for 15 minutes on one side; then finish feed on the other. Next feed opposite breast to start. I literally wrote down which breast started the feed as I never could remember!

Once the 1 hour is up; baby is back in bed (quick nappy change)

I do think wrapping helps (it stops their flailing arms waking them); I found the stretchy fabric easiest to use to get a snug wrap. You are aiming to immobilize the arms BUT KEEP THE HIPS FREE – allow the legs to flex; there is evidence wrapping so tight they have their legs stuck straight is not good for hip development. I kept wrapping until about 4 months, when they were starting to try to roll.

The average sleep cycle is 45 minutes, so expect the baby to sleep for 2 sleep cycles before the next feed.

Watch and clock and WAKE your newborn when the next 3 hr feed is due. Do not let your newborn sleep too long in the daytime (occasionally stretch out to 4 hours if you need to sleep or something, but don't do as a regular thing). Keep the 3 hourly cycle during the daylight hours for up to 6 months! (more on that later)

Put baby to bed awake (don't stress if the newborn has already fallen asleep; new newborns will sleep anywhere; once they get bigger it won't be so easy!). Say some words like "off to sleep now" and then leave the room.

WAIT 15 MINUTES. It's OK (in my opinion) for the baby to cry for up to 15 minutes. Watch the clock, as a crying baby is hard to listen to and the time seems to drag.

If you get to 15 minutes and no luck, pick up baby, burp him/her; check nappy and try again. Wait 15 minutes again. If still no luck and you are confident baby is not hungry (could try feeding again esp if seems hungry eg mouthing, sucking hand); the next step is soothing techniques like shush-patting (saying shoosh, shoosh, while gently patting back). Over-tired babies struggle to get to sleep, so if you 'missed the boat' and kept the newborn up a tad too long, this could be why they might be struggling to wind down. If they have had a recent feed and are definitely not hungry then holding a dummy in the mouth can help them wind-down (sucking is soothing).

After 45 minutes sleep your baby will probably wake up (between sleep cycles). DO NOT GO IN! With your first baby, it is natural to rush in at any noise; but this is where RUSH SLOWLY comes in

Rush slowly if newborn is safe and supposed to be asleep

If you hear your baby awake between sleep cycles, try not to disturb them; they should go back to sleep. This is where a video monitor can be helpful; or being able to peer through the door without baby seeing you. Unfortunately, if baby sees you, they will then start protesting and you will probably have to get them up. If you just wait 15 minutes, they will probably go back to sleep.

This also applies to night wakings once your baby has started to sleep longer at night. By about 6-9 weeks of age your baby will skip a night feed and sleep for a 5-6 hour stretch. By about 3 months of

age, your baby should be doing an 8 hr stretch at night. If your baby 'regresses' and starts waking again, RUSH SLOWLY. By now you should have a bit of an idea of their normal cry vs distressed cry; so you will not rush in; just wait 15 minutes and they will probably go back to sleep. If they don't, they will need to be checked (nappy/temperature/wrap come off/??hungry)

A good day sleeper is a good night sleeper

Some people think if they exhaust their baby enough in the daytime they will sleep great at night. NOPE. They just end up with an overtired baby who doesn't know what it wants.

Aim to get that first morning sleep in nice and early – if you miss or delay the morning sleep, your whole day can get stuffed up. If this happens, write the day off and start again tomorrow.

Try to stick with the 3-hour cycle throughout the whole day; with cluster-feeding in the afternoon (4pm-10pm) if your baby wants it. No need to force cluster-feeding on your baby if they are fine and sticking to their 3 hr feed over this time; but most babies are unsettled from 4pm-7pm so this is when everything goes out the window and you figure out what works for you (bath, cluster-feed, bed, walk, cuddles with dad)

Break the rules sometimes for your own sanity but not often enough to create bad habits

3 days to make a habit; 3 days to break a habit

I was so determined to 'get things right' that I may have over-thought and over-worried about things at times. So give yourself a break at times; as long as you are doing things mostly right most of the time, and you have a game-plan, you should be fine. At the end of the day, it's about making things easier for yourselves in the long-run. "Start out as you intend to continue".

Gary Ezzo says something like "you are teaching your child the gift of sleep"

Even when you do everything 'right' you will still have times when your baby refuses to sleep. I found having visitors would throw things out; I did struggle to get the newborn to sleep when visitors were around. So you can choose to keep the baby up (esp if it is the evening) and try again tomorrow.

A timeline summary of what to expect:

Newborn-6 weeks – 3-hour feed/sleep cycle day and night (don't wake baby for the night feeds)

6 weeks-3 months – 3 hour day feeds; on demand overnight feeds (3-6 hourly)

3 months onwards – can cut down to 4 hourly day feeds once sleeping 8 or more hours at night.

You can try dreamfeeds (waking baby for a feed) at 10pm to get the 8 hr stretch 10pm-6am. Only cut down to 4 hourly day feeds when the child is doing 8 hr sleeps at night (don't be tempted to cut down from 3hrly day feeds until night sleeping is established; think of it as getting as much milk in during the day so that they will sleep longer at night)