

For Parents of Infants 6 months and up

*When referring to your baby, we alternate the use of 'he' and 'she', but the information applies to both.

If you have concerns like these, you are not alone...

My baby takes short cat naps throughout the day

My baby fights going down for her naps

My baby wakes as soon as I put her in the crib

Is my baby getting enough sleep?

Keys to Nap Time Sleep

- ⇒ **Provide a safe and comfortable place for baby to sleep**
- ⇒ **Work on consistent day time and night time routines**
- ⇒ **Teach baby to calm himself when he gets tired or upset**
- ⇒ **Start healthy patterns, routines and habits around sleep**

★ Before starting to teach your baby healthy sleep habits, make sure she is healthy and gaining weight for her age. Your local Community Health Center (CHC) or Health Unit (HU) can help you with this.

Babies do not need to “cry it out” to learn healthy sleep.

Things to Know About Infant Sleep

- A baby who is very short on sleep may be crabby and have trouble falling and staying asleep. If you are unsure how much sleep your baby is getting, keep track for 2-3 days.
- Naps that are very short may not be providing the sleep benefits that your baby needs.
- **To catch baby before she gets overtired look for early sleepy cues such as rubbing her eyes, yawning, rapid blinking or a glazed look in her eyes.**

One of the most common reasons for a baby to have trouble going down for naps is that she is overtired. This can make it hard for her to calm herself and go to sleep at nap time.

- As soon as you see one or more of these cues, it is time for baby to have a nap. Waiting too long to settle baby for a nap, may result in her getting overtired. A baby who is overtired may “fight” her naps or be very fussy and hard to settle at naptime.
- If baby has learned how to settle himself he will be able to go back to sleep. This is called **independent sleep**. If he has learned that you rock or feed him to sleep he will wake up and need you to do it for him. You can teach your baby independent sleep using the keys to naptime sleep discussed in this handout.
- Be calm and consistent, **your baby can learn how to nap** for longer periods of time.

It is normal for babies to wake up several times during each nap as they go from light to deep sleep.

Tips for Teaching Baby How to Nap

- 1. Sleep Cues:** When your baby is 5-6 months old, start looking for early sleeps cues about 90 minutes after baby wakes up in the morning. Even if you don't see any cues, start getting her ready to nap about 2 hours after she wakes up for the day. Don't wait until your baby is fussy and crying to get her ready for her nap.
- 2. Routines:** This could include a dark room, turning on a white noise machine and putting her into the crib drowsy but awake.
 - If you feed baby as part of the naptime routine, it should occur early in the nap time routine.
 - Expose your baby to daylight within an hour of waking up to set her day-and-night clock for the day.
- 3. Patterns and habits around sleep, also called sleep associations.** How do you get baby ready for naps? Do you always feed or rock your baby to sleep? When babies are young they need us to do this for them. As they get older they can learn how to sleep on their own.
 - Remove the breast or bottle from her mouth just before she falls asleep. Watch for her sucking and swallowing to slow down. Give her a quick cuddle and put her in her crib.
 - Try not to rock, sway or bounce as you settle baby for nap. Try a different chair to help you stop rocking.
 - Put baby to sleep in her crib (or other safe sleeping place) instead of holding her for naps.

Starting a nap time routine will teach baby's brain "it's time to sleep!"

Putting baby to bed drowsy but awake is key to learning independent sleep.

- If your baby wakes up within 30 minutes of going down for her nap, go in 5 minutes before she usually wakes up, put your hand lightly on her tummy or side and make a “shhh” sound while you gently rub or pat her body. **The goal is to help her fall back to sleep after this brief awakening.**
- If she wakes up, try for a minute to settle her in her crib. If she is fully awake, pick her up and go on with your day. Try again next nap.

4. Calming: When babies are younger they need us to calm and sooth them when they are upset or tired. As babies grow older they can learn how to calm themselves. This will create brain pathways that allow her to calm herself at sleep time and throughout her life.

- First, watch your baby – does she always hold your shirt when she breastfeeds? Rub her ear? Pull at your hair? These are things babies do to feel good or calm themselves. If she already has a calming motion you can help her to do more of that when she is tired or upset.

If your baby doesn't have a calming pattern, you can teach her to rub her cheek or rub her fingers over a blanket (for safe sleep: only one light blanket and no toys in crib).

Another idea is to rub or pat her tummy with your hand over hers.

- Consider making the one blanket in your baby's bed smell like you, this will help your baby feel calm at nap time. Every time you pick your baby up to feed him or cuddle him, pick up the blanket and tuck it in with the two of you. Take the same blanket and use it to tuck baby in at naptime.
- A comfort object or “lovey” can also be used to teach baby how to calm herself before sleep time. Make sure the “lovey” is safe for your baby and cannot cause choking. Make the lovey smell like you and then use it every time you cuddle or comfort your baby.

5. Sleep Space: If you are lying down with or holding your baby for naps, try moving him to his own sleeping space.

- If baby has been sleeping in your room, this is a good time to start the transition to his own room and crib.
- Your baby can learn to “like” his crib if he spends happy time in it. Put him in his crib while he is awake and you do chores in his room, talk and sing to him when he is awake.

It takes time for babies to learn new things. Plan to practice the new sleeping skill for 2 weeks to help your baby learn it well.

- Then move to naps in the crib with you in the room and then naps in the crib with you out of the room.

Every baby is unique in how much sleep they need. This chart is a general guide

Age	How many naps	Nap time sleep	Total sleep
4 months	3 or 4	4 to 6 hours	12 to 14 hours
6 months	2 or 3	3 to 4 hours	11.5 to 13.5 hours
9 months	2	2.5 to 3 hours	11 to 13 hours
12 months	1 or 2	1.5 to 2.5 hours	11 to 12.5 hours

Other Tips for Helping Baby Sleep

- Use white noise during his nap, for example, a small fan placed away from baby.
- **Allow baby to move, wiggle and “talk” as he settles himself for sleep. This is another form of self-calming.**
- Make a plan to help your baby learn new ways to settle and go back to sleep at night. Tell everyone who helps care for your baby what your plan is.
- Think of yourself as her sleep coach; you will teach her the new "game plan", encourage her as she learns new skills and be there when she needs help.
- Babies need warmth and structure from their parents to build strong brains and learn healthy sleep.
- Some babies learn a new healthy way to sleep quickly. Others need a lot of help, a calm approach and lots of repetition.

If your baby is having a bad day, can't settle or gets very upset with new nap time routines and sleep tips, calm her like you normally do. Try again next nap time with the plan you have developed.

Don't be afraid to ask for help; your Family Doctor, Public Health Nurse or Health Link (dial 811) are all available to help you. Trust your instincts. You know your baby best.

Remember your baby does not have to “cry it out” to learn healthy sleep. With your support and loving care your baby can learn healthy sleep habits.

For more information on healthy infant sleep and parenting in the Early Years go to: www.foothillsnetwork.ca