

The Children's Doctor



How to get your baby to sleep ...

All babies need to sleep. A newborn baby needs to sleep from 18 to 20 hours per day. At the age of 4 weeks, most babies become more alert and sleep times may reduce to 16-18 hours per day. At 3 months of age, babies need 15 hours of sleep per day and at 12 months of age, toddlers need 14 hours of sleep per day. It is important to establish good sleep routines early as it will make the next 5 years much easier for you and your child. We know that sleep deprivation has huge and potentially disastrous effects on adults. It stands to reason then, that sleep deprivation can have a drastic effect on our children who are in a period of rapid growth and development.

Some babies are born knowing how to sleep. Most babies, however, need to be taught. This means you need to teach your baby when it is sleep time and when it is play time. The first rule to teaching a baby to sleep is to have a consistent sleep time routine. Sing a repetitive sleep time song, tell a story or just have a cuddle in the same place at each sleep time. Do not feed your baby off to sleep. Feeds should be for nutrition, not for settling off to sleep. Your baby needs to learn to put himself to sleep so that he can resettle if he stirs during the night. Do not have toys or mobiles in or near the cot as these may distract your baby and he may think it is play time! Put your baby down to sleep in the same place each sleep time. Give your baby a settling cuddle but do not let your baby go to sleep in your arms. If the baby stirs later in his cot, he will get a fright because you are no longer there. He will get a rush of adrenaline because he will be unsure of where he is and will scream for you. He will then be difficult to resettle. It is better to teach your baby to go to sleep in the cot so that when the baby stirs overnight, he will recognise his surroundings and will not startle. He will then resettle without you needing to come into the room.

Babies should be wrapped firmly at sleep time, using a light cotton fabric measuring 150cmx100cm. This helps to limit the startle reflex which often wakes babies when transitioning between sleep cycles. It also makes them feel snug, safe and secure thus encouraging a peaceful sleep. Remember, the sooner you establish a good sleep routine for your baby, the better your life will be and the happier and healthier your baby will be!