

# SLEEP AND YOUR INFANT

## *Baby basics*

Learning to care for your infant can be simultaneously exciting and challenging. Sleep patterns of newborns can be especially challenging for parents. Most newborns sleep almost 16-18 hours throughout the day and night. However, they may not sleep at times that are convenient for you. Newborns have a small digestive system, and it is normal for them to wake every 3-4 hours to be fed. By 4-6 months, your newborn may start to sleep for 6-8 hours at night and take two shorter naps during the day, for a total of 10-14 hours. It takes some infants longer to establish this routine. Be patient with your infant she may get hungry or need extra sleep.

## *Putting your baby to sleep*

- **Babies don't sleep anywhere.** Some infants are more sensitive to the amount of noise or level of light, and may have trouble sleeping or sleep for less time because they get scared or are awakened. Try and put your infant to sleep in an area where there are fewer distractions. However, make sure you check on him often and can hear him if he cries.
- **Sleep safety.** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that infants be put to sleep on their backs, on a firm surface, in a room that is not too warm, in a non-smoking environment, and with no toys or loose bedding. Toys and loose bedding can hurt your infant or interfere with his breathing. Sleeping on the side or stomach can also interfere with your infant's breathing and cause him to suffocate, also known as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- **Setting a schedule.** Establish a bedtime routine for your infant, with soothing activities such as bathing, rocking, singing, or reading to her. This will help her learn when it is time to go to bed. Try to put her in her crib right before she falls asleep instead of letting her fall asleep in your arms. This will teach her to put herself to sleep later on or if she wakes up during the night. Although it might be hard, letting your infant cry for a short time is not bad for her. Infants generally go to bed early in the evening. Putting your infant to bed later will not necessarily make her wake up later. In fact, it may make her cranky and less likely to fall asleep. As she gets older, try gently adjusting your infant's nap schedule so she can enjoy more of the day and sleep through more of the night by waking her from a long afternoon nap.

## *Soothing your baby*

In his book *The Happiest Baby on the Block: The New Way to Calm Crying and Help Your Newborn Baby Sleep Longer*, Dr. Harvey Karp offers a practical plan to sooth your baby. Try following any or all of Dr. Karp's 5 S's: swaddling, side or stomach, soothing sounds, swinging, or sucking.

## SLEEP AND YOUR INFANT (CONTINUED)

### *Dr. Karp's 5 S's*

- **Swaddling.** 1. Spread a square blanket on a flat surface in a diamond shape. 2. Fold the top corner down so the top point touches the center of the blanket. 3. Place your baby on the blanket so her neck lies on the top edge. 4. Straighten your baby's right arm down at her side and pull the blanket by her right shoulder down very tightly across her body, tucking it in under her back. It should look like half of a v-neck sweater. 5. Straighten her left arm down at her side and bring the bottom corner straight up to cover her arm over her left shoulder. 6. Pull the blanket corner located over her left shoulder down to her chest. 7. Grab the last free blanket corner with your right hand and pull it straight out to your right to gather up any slack. Finally, pull it around the baby and tuck it so it's snug behind the baby, tucking the end in the blanket folds. Practicing the swaddling technique on a doll first may help you feel more confident before you try it on your baby.
- **Side or stomach.** Do this while calming your infant, since this is how he likely feels most secure. However, when you finally place him in his crib, put him on his back to sleep.
- **Soothing sounds.** While in utero, your baby heard a constant "whoosh" of sound in your body. Once born, these rhythmic sounds can continue to soothe her. Use of a white noise machine, the dishwasher, or washing machine are sounds you can try. Singing to your infant or playing music softly can also help calm her. Even talking to her softly can do the trick – your calm voice may reassure her and make her feel safe.
- **Swinging.** Since your infant got used to moving around with you when he was in the womb, gentle, rhythmic movement may help to soothe him. Try taking him for a walk in a stroller, putting him in an infant swing, or rocking him.
- **Sucking.** Sucking turns on your infant's calming reflexes. Dr. Karp suggests introducing a pacifier for the first four months of your infant's life to help calm her when she is upset.