

Babies: Phasing out nighttime feedings

Reviewed by SickKids Staff | Last updated: May 19th 2010

An overview on how to make nighttime feedings easier on mother and child, and eventually to do away with them completely.

Key points

- Babies are not born knowing that they should sleep at night and be awake during the day.
- In the early months, allow the baby to decide their own schedule of feedings.
- Adjust activity and noise levels at feeding time so that there are more during the day, less at night.
- Mothers' available milk volume and baby's feeding behavior determine the number of nighttime feedings.

Typically, newborn babies have one long four- to five-hour sleep period per 24 hours. This may or may not occur at night. Babies are not born with a "circadian rhythm." The circadian rhythm is when the body knows to sleep at night and stay awake during the day. This rhythm begins at around eight weeks of age. Until then, you should follow your baby's cues for feeding and sleeping.



In general, babies will sleep through the night by six months of age. Night sleeping may occur much sooner for some. Even if your baby sleeps through the night earlier than other babies, illnesses, teething, or separation anxiety may cause your baby's sleep routine to change.

Each baby has different feeding and sleeping behaviours. During the first few weeks, most breastfed babies wake up every 2 to 3 hours, day or night, to feed.

How often your baby will wake to feed

There are two factors that influence how often a baby wakes to feed:

- their mother's available milk volume
- the feeding behaviour of the baby

Available milk volumes

Some mothers have greater milk volumes and their babies will tend to feed less often. Other mothers may find that their baby requires more frequent feedings to get the same amount of milk.

Feeding behaviours

Babies also have their own feeding behaviours. These will dictate the length of the feeding. For example, some babies enjoy a ravenous quick feeding. Other babies enjoy a slow gourmet feed. As breast milk is easier to digest than formula milk, breastfed babies will tend to empty their stomachs faster and wake to feed more often, both night and day. This is normal breastfeeding behaviour.

How to help your baby sleep at night

- If your baby has days and nights mixed up, or sleeps for long periods in the daytime, you can try to wake them after three hours to feed.
- Expose your baby to more light and noise during the day. Dim lights and quiet for nighttime.
- During nighttime feedings, don't turn on the television. Minimize talking and activity.
- To make nighttime feedings easier, keep your baby close to your bed.
- This "quiet time" will help condition your baby to quietness and encourage sleeping behaviours.
- Make middle of the night feedings quick and quiet, not playtime. During the day provide extra cuddling, play and stimulation time. Some babies will feed more frequently in the evening (called cluster feeding) to try to stock up to sleep through the night.
- Put your baby in a crib while sleepy, to encourage the baby to fall asleep by themselves.
- For an older baby, develop a sleep time routine that starts at the same time each evening (such as bath and bedtime story).

Night sleeping

Sleeping through the night (for about six hours) may occur as early as one month. For other babies, sleeping through the night may not occur for several months depending on the feeding,

comfort, and attachment needs of the baby. To help decrease night feeds as your baby approaches six months, gradually decrease how long you breast feed at each night feeding.

Please visit [AboutKidsHealth.ca](https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca) for more child health information.

©2022 The Hospital for Sick Children