Sleeping Problems in Babies

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Everyone is aware of the importance of sleep. No matter what age, sleep is a vital part of maintaining physical as well as mental health. As a parent it is important to instill good sleeping habits in your children beginning in infancy. Sleep for infants not only restores energy, but it also stimulates development. In order for an infant to develop a healthy sleep routine, parents need to be aware of the effects of inconsistent sleep, how to develop a routine for the infant, how to prevent sleep problems for infants, and how to repair sleep problems already developed.

Effects of Inconsistent Sleep Patterns in Infants

The sleeping patterns of infants affect more than just the infants themselves. Their sleep patterns affect the whole family. The sleeping routine for infants is important at night and throughout the day. From waking in the middle of the night numerous times to come to the aid of a crying infant to caring for an irritable, fussy baby throughout the day, it is crucial to develop a consistent sleep pattern. Sleeping patterns developed in infants will help later sleeping routines as the child matures.

How to Develop a Sleeping Routine for an Infant and Prevent Sleep Problems

An excellent step-by-step guide to developing a healthy sleeping routine for an infant from birth up to the first year of the baby’s life can be found at http://www.kidsource.com/lspchs/sleep.problems.html. Some of the tips for developing an infant’s sleeping routine include putting the baby down to sleep when s/he becomes tired, making sure the baby falls asleep when the parent is out of the room to prevent dependence on seeing the parent before falling asleep, situating the baby so s/he is not too
cold or too hot, and leaving a small amount of noise for the baby to fall asleep to. It is recommended that a parent should allow the baby to settle down himself/herself when s/he becomes fussy in the middle of the night. However within the first three months it is important to hold the child whenever s/he cries or becomes fussy because reassurance of support is still developing. Experts also strongly emphasize the importance of eating habits and the correlation with sleeping habits. Feedings should not be too often because the baby will wake more frequently during the night for feedings. Other routines that affect a baby’s sleeping habits include the setting in which the baby falls to sleep. The same amount of lighting, similar temperature, arrangement of blankets, stuffed animals, dolls, or other toys should be consistent each night. Once the baby is six months old a parent should begin to delay coming to the aid of the fussy baby by just a few minutes. Also at this time, routines before bed become increasingly important.

**Fixing Sleep Problems**

Once a baby is around six months old s/he should be sleeping through the whole night. This decision however is up to the parents, but there is no need for a baby to have nighttime feedings once s/he is six months old. When attempting to teach a baby how to sleep through the night it is important to make the child realize that nothing thrilling is going on and try to do as little as possible to comfort the child. Limit the comforting techniques to light rubbing of the back or head or giving the child their comfort blanket, stuffed animal, doll, or other toy. The important thing is to instill in the child a bedtime routine so s/he will begin to associate particular surroundings and activities right before bedtime and during the night. If s/he is comfortable and used to his/her surroundings then falling back to sleep without the aid of a parent will be easier. A popular technique
for teaching a child to sleep on his/her own was developed by Dr. Richard Ferber explained in his book *Solve Your Child’s Sleeping Problems*. Ferber’s approach is one of progression and includes a technique of allowing the baby to cry and fuss for increasing periods of time. This process should continue until the baby begins to sleep throughout the entire night. For more detailed information on Ferber’s method and other sleep advice for infants go to


For further information regarding this article please contact the Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Emory West Campus, 1256 Briarcliff Road N.E., Suite 323-West, Atlanta GA, 30306. You can email us at msacd@listserv.cc.emory.edu, visit our website at http://www.emory.edu/MSACD, or phone us at 404-712-9800.

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