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# Your growing baby: practical ways to support sleep

4 MONTHS – 8 MONTHS

EARLY YEARS SLEEP GUIDE SERIES: TWO



Many parents often seek help or extra support at this time as they are surprised by sudden changes to their baby’s sleep.

It is also a time when parents are ready to create sleep changes and need to be prepared!



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## Safe sleeping and key messages



By now you should have moved your baby from their bassinet to a safe cot — one that meets the AUS/NZ safety standards.

Your baby should also no longer be swaddled but instead have moved to an arms-out, age-appropriate, safe sleeping bag.

From 7 months and onwards a **small** transition object such as a small soft toy can be given to your baby in a cot; but always keep head and face uncovered and make sure the toy doesn't have any buttons/batteries etc that could be choking hazard.

Always put your baby on their back to sleep. This never changes no matter how old your baby/child is! As your baby develops the skill of rolling (usually around 4–6 months but may be earlier) and can roll proficiently both ways (tummy to back and back to tummy) it is okay to let them find their own natural sleeping position after you place them into bed.

If baby can only roll unaided in one direction, then you should gently roll them back on to their back whenever you see they have rolled onto their front or side (see more [here](#)). Never use wedges to stop rolling as this is more dangerous.

## Safe sleeping CHECKLIST

- The baby is **ALWAYS** placed to sleep in the cot on their back on a firm, flat, clean and well fitted mattress — **NEVER** on their stomach. Tummy sleeping reduces a baby's arousal level and ability to swallow.
- Feet to bottom of cot; securely tuck in blankets and ensure the baby's feet are touching the bottom of the cot.
- As an alternative to blankets, use a safe baby sleeping bag with fitted neck and armholes and no hood.
- Hats, bonnets, hooded clothing and other head coverings are removed before sleep.
- NO** pillows, cot bumpers, lambs wools, teddies, doonas — they can increase the risk of an accident by suffocation and can be used as a step to climb up and over the cot.
- NO** soft toys in the cot under 7 months of age. After this a **small** transition object may be introduced.
- NO** soft surfaces or bulky bedding.
- Cot meets current Australian and New Zealand Standard (AS/NZS 2172:2003). Parents planning to use a second-hand cot, ensure that it meets these standards.
- Mattress is firm, clean, flat and correct size for the cot.
- Mattress is **NEVER** to be tilted or elevated.
- The baby is not wearing any necklaces, amber beads or clothing with ties or drawstrings that could make breathing difficult.
- Do **NOT** wrap a baby once they show signs of rolling. Once a baby has started to roll they should no longer be wrapped or swaddled — their arms need to be free.
- Sleep babies in a cot beside the parents' bed for the first six to twelve months of their life so that they can be effectively monitored. For day sleeps, monitor sleeping children at regular intervals.
- Bean bags, sofa, large cushions and air mattresses are **NOT** recommended as a safe surface for young children to sleep.
- Safe sleeping education alone is not enough — it is important to understand the capacity of an infant and toddler, and how to settle them effectively, so that unsafe practices do not occur.
- Drop cot base to lowest level once your baby is sitting to prevent a fall/injury.

## How much sleep does my baby need?

A baby between 4 and 8 months needs a total of 14–15 hours of sleep during a 24 hour period. This will often include 2–3 naps during the day — in younger babies the third nap is often a ‘catnap’ to tie them over until bedtime. Older babies may not need this third nap at all.

Your baby may still wake through the night to feed — even if they have started solids. Irregular and unpredictable sleep patterns are normal at this age — your baby is unique and reading their tired signs/ cues is essential.

Understanding sleep windows and awake time is really helpful so as not to keep babies up too long and prevent them from becoming overtired! Awake windows for this age are approximately:

3–5m	1.5–2 hours awake time
6–8m	2–3 hours awake time



## Tired signs

*Key is to spot the early signs!*

From around 4 months your baby will have more awake time. It is easier to settle babies by looking out for their early tired signs:

- Glazed eyes / long blank stares
- Pale face
- Jerky movements
- Fast breathing
- Easily bored, staring intently at an object

## Sleep cycle is lengthening

By 8 months the average sleep cycle will have lengthened to about 45 minutes. You will know if your baby is able to join one sleep cycle to the next — if they don’t wake up after 45 minutes and sleep for an hour or more!

Ideally, you want your baby to settle back to sleep between the cycles without your help. If they wake after about 45 minutes, offer them a few minutes of settling to help them drift back into their next sleep. If they don’t drift back to sleep — that’s fine. Just get them up and try at the next sleep. Small steps are all you need at this age and stage.



## Common Challenges

### 4 month sleep regression (or a brain progression!)

The 4 month sleep ‘regression’ — or as we like to call it, a brain progression — is one of the most common challenges of this age. Your baby may have started to form a pattern of feeding and sleeping and then at 4 months it can all be thrown out of line! Parents often wonder if their baby will ever sleep! Yes, they will!

It’s handy for parents to know that these brain progressions can last anywhere from 2 to 6 weeks and most likely coincide with a cognitive or developmental milestone. This is your baby’s brain in action.

Often a regression in sleep is a sign that your child is about to make a big jump forward in their development. Afterwards you look back and have an “aha moment” and think “aha...so, that is what was happening!”

Commonly sleep regressions tend to happen at:

6 weeks	Baby’s sense of smell, sight, hearing, touch and taste may all change around now.
3 months:	Baby’s world is becoming more organised and they become more aware of their surroundings.
4 months:	Baby is starting to learn cause and effect — that actions have consequences.
6 months:	Baby is becoming increasingly mobile and is discovering many new things about their world. Introducing solids can impact sleep.
8 months:	During this time, baby will become absorbed and fascinated by minor details. Sleep can also be impacted at this time by separation anxiety.
10 months:	It’s around now, that baby will learnt to recognise the flow of events over time.
12 months:	Baby is quickly becoming a toddler and learning patterns of if-then decision making
18 months:	Your toddler starts to push boundaries and test their (and your) limits.
24 months:	Toddler starts to understand ownership as well as the differences between people.

Importantly, it’s key to anticipate when they occur so you can be prepared and plan. Don’t worry, most children do not experience a full regression at each of these milestones.

### Sleep associations

*Help! My baby always needs rocking or holding to sleep?!*



Essentially a sleep association is what babies become accustomed to when they go to sleep. An example would be a ride in the car, a cuddle or some other prompt which helps them go to sleep. Then when they reach their next sleep cycle, which is about 45 minutes later (give or take) they simply want to experience the same sleep association again to get back to sleep.

As a baby grows and settles into a sleep pattern, dependent sleep associations can become a hindrance.

**This does not mean that we don’t respond to their feeding cues.**

It is biologically normal for babies to wake for feeds overnight!

If a baby only learns to go to sleep relying on the dependent association they don’t learn skills in self soothing. This means that when they wake through the night, they look for the same cues or prompts to go back to sleep again. They inevitably wake and will need the same dependent association as they had when they were placed into their cot.

**This doesn’t mean leaving the baby or toddler to cry!**

We need to help settle our babies back to sleep using age appropriate settling skills.

## Common Challenges

### How do I settle my baby to sleep?

Settling techniques that worked in the newborn period often have the opposite effect as babies are moving towards more independent ways of settling.

#### *Support and guidance for parents at this time is key*

We know that consistency and persistence is important. Change is not quick and it can take parents and children weeks to learn new skills in settling

1. Start by setting up the environment — a darkened room, music or white noise can help a baby relax.
2. By now your baby should be in an age appropriate safe wearable sleeping bag with their arms out. You do not need extra blankets or any other bedding in the cot.
3. Once your baby is calm in your arms (not asleep), gently place them into their cot. Try not to hesitate even if you are worried that your baby will protest. Your baby will pick up on this hesitation.
4. If your baby remains calm, slowly move away and give them the opportunity to drift to sleep.
5. Once out of eyesight from your baby, wait and listen. If they fussing or grizzling, give them a chance to get comfortable on their own. Like adults, babies also need time to settle.
6. At this age some babies like to practice some of their new skills as they settle to sleep — rolling, sitting or rocking. Respect their space and allow them to do so.

If your baby cries out wait and listen to see if the crying tapers off. If it does, let them continue to manage on their own.

7. A loud forceful cry that continues for more than 3 cry outs means that they are not managing on their own and need your help.
8. Pick your baby up. If your baby nuzzles into you and calms quickly, you may like to start the above steps again. If your baby continues to cry — this is your cue to end the settling for this time. Use your go-to settling strategies and attempt the above settling steps again at the next sleep time.

### Key things to remember...

- For a baby, being helped to go to sleep is interpreted as a good thing. Their parent is close and hasn't left them and they feel safe and secure.
- Always seek medical attention if you think your baby is unwell.
- It's so important to look, listen and think about what might be going on for our babies and children and respond to their cues and behaviours. But remember, babies have a slower transmission of nerve impulses, which can present as a small lag time when they respond, so just be patient and wait.
- Providing a safe, predictable and calm environment is important to support sleep.



## Products you might like to try...



### Cocoon Swaddle Bag

Unlike traditional swaddles, this zip-up swaddle is both easy to use and difficult to escape from. It's TOG rated for warmth to keep baby snug and securely swaddled without the need for complicated wrapping from day one. Featuring press studs on the arm holes, it can be converted into a sleeping bag. Suitable for ages 0–12M.



### Long Sleeve Layer

Made from a deliciously soft, stretchy organic jersey cotton, these are comfortable and warm during sleep. The slim-fit design prevents bunching underneath your child's pouch, and the breathable, natural fibres help regulate body temperature and prevent overheating. Suitable for ages 0–24M.



### Butterfly Cardi

Innovatively designed to be a transition aid worn over your baby's swaddle or sleeping bag, the Butterfly Cardi helps them transition to arms-out with minimal sleep interruptions and maximum sleep comfort. Suitable for ages 2–6M.



### Jersey Sleeping Bag

If your baby has graduated from swaddled sleeping and has outgrown their Cocoon Swaddle Bag, you may like to move them to a Jersey Sleeping Bag. The safe-sleep approved design is made from soft, stretchy GOTS certified organic cotton that is non-toxic and gentle of baby's skin. Suitable for ages 3–24M.

**Next up...** Our 8–12 Month Guide will be released on 14/4/2021

Written for ergoPouch by Cindy Davenport, Clinical Director [Safe Sleep Space](#). This content is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. If all you think about all day is baby sleep or the struggles of parenting, then it is definitely time to chat about it. Our telephone consultation service is very popular and produces amazing results. Our calls are delivered by qualified health professionals who can offer recommendations to help address your sleep and settling concerns. Phone consultations are available Australia wide or internationally via phone or Skype. [Book online now](#) or call us on 1300 775 337.