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SafeSleepSpace<sup>SSS</sup>

# Sleep, baby, sleep: establishing healthy sleep patterns

8 MONTHS – 12 MONTHS

EARLY YEARS SLEEP GUIDE SERIES: THREE



From about 8 months of age babies tend to sleep for around 12 hours at night often waking only for 1 or 2 feeds. Don't worry though if your baby wakes more frequently than this for feeds; it is also perfectly normal.

Day naps become more predictable at this age and tend to consist of two longer sleeps of around 1–2 hours, with some babies still perhaps needing a catnap late in the afternoon.

At this age, your baby may be able to be awake for up to 3 hours between sleeps, ([see our sleep charts](#)) however this relies on them getting enough sleep during the day, and overnight, which is really crucial to their development.



## CONTENTS

Safe sleeping and key messages .....	2
Introducing a pattern .....	2
Look at my new skills! .....	3
How do I settle my baby to sleep? .....	3
Separation anxiety .....	4
Be aware of overtiredness .....	5
To offer a dream feed or not? .....	5
A note on dummies .....	5
Key things to remember .....	6

## Safe sleeping and key messages

**Safety continues to be important** — your baby should **no longer be swaddled** but instead have moved to an arms-out, age-appropriate, safe sleeping bag with correct arm and neck holes which will keep them snug and warm wherever they settle in the cot.

Remember, you do not need extra blankets or any other bedding in the cot! And:

- ❑ **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.
- ❑ **ALWAYS** place your baby to sleep in the cot on their back on a firm, flat, clean and well fitted mattress.  
This never changes no matter how old your baby/child is!
- ❑ And **ALWAYS** remember the [6 key safe sleeping messages](#)

## Introducing a pattern

If you have already introduced your baby to ‘patterning’, continue to use these techniques to help them prepare for sleep.

If you haven’t introduced patterning — which is a set pattern or similar experience that they are exposed to over and over at sleep time — now is a great time to start!

A sleep pattern might look like this...

- A bath or massage
- Changing into their pyjamas or getting into their sleeping bag
- Reading a bedtime story
- Listening to some quiet music
- A feed
- A kiss and a cuddle

It doesn’t matter what you choose to do, as long as you follow the same order of events, it will help your baby learn to anticipate the sequence of events associated with going to sleep.

**Try and also keep the rest of your baby’s daily routine consistent.**

If they feed, play and nap at roughly the same time every day it helps your baby settle into a daily rhythm and they are more likely to settle at bedtime without a struggle.





## Look at my new skills!

Babies at this age love to practice their often newly acquired skills such as rolling, sitting, or even standing in their cot. They are also often more vocal with their sleep noises which you may hear when your baby is winding down for sleep and also in between sleep cycles.

Sitting, crawling, pulling to stand and cruising around the cot can interrupt sleep.

While this can be frustrating for you as parents and carers, understand that it's just as frustrating for your little one to find themselves in a seated position with no idea how to lie themselves back down.

### *What else can they do but cry out for your help?*

This is when your baby needs you to help them settle back to sleep. See our steps to settling next.



## How do I settle my baby to sleep?

At this age, quiet time in preparation for sleep, needs to be early enough to avoid your baby getting overtired.

1. Try to offer 15 to 25 minutes of winding baby down sleep messages/cues in a space that is free from stimulation or too much activity.
2. Give baby a signal that it's nearly time for bed — they're old enough now to understand what this means.
3. Read a book together, get them into their pyjamas or sleeping bag
4. If your baby cries during this preparation stage that's perfectly normal — it's their way of anticipating and preparing for sleep. Take a few deep breaths with your baby, hold them close and gently rock them in an upright position. The upright cuddle lessens the expectation of being fed to sleep. Quietly tell them it's time for sleep.
5. Once your baby is calm in your arms (not asleep), gently place them into their cot, but with purpose. Try not to hesitate as you are placing baby in the cot even if you may be worried that your baby may protest. Your baby will pick up on your hesitation and start to become concerned about being placed in the cot. It is better to follow through with baby being placed on the mattress of the cot even if only for a few seconds before being picked up again then hesitating halfway through! Following through with your actions will help baby feel safe and secure.
6. If they remain calm, slowly move away and give them the opportunity to drift to sleep.
7. Once out of eyesight from your baby, wait and listen. If they are grizzling or fussing — give them the chance to "nest" and get comfortable on their own. Just like we toss and turn in bed before drifting to sleep, babies also need time to settle in. At this age, some babies like to practice some of their new skills like rocking, sitting or standing during this period. Respect their space and allow them to do so.
8. If your baby cries out, wait and listen to see if the cry tapers off. If it does, let them continue to settle on their own.



9. A loud forceful cry that continues for more than 3 cry outs means they are not managing on their own and need your help. If that's the case, start by comforting them with some shushing from the door. If they calm, continue for about 5 seconds or so then move away and give them a chance to drift off to sleep. If they continue to cry, they may need more emotional support. It's not uncommon for babies of this age to sit or stand only to find they don't yet have the skills to lie back down.
10. If your baby is sitting or standing, offer a little settling for about 10 seconds or so before helping guide them back to their sleeping position. The idea is to encourage them to lie down voluntarily versus forcing them down. To support this process, use the daytime to play games that teach your baby how to sit down from standing and lie down from sitting.
11. If your baby is still not calming, drop down low beside the cot, reach through the side rails and place your hand on the mattress and begin patting and shushing — this gives a clear message that you are not about to pick up your baby but you are there to support them in settling.
12. If your baby requires more comforting try stroking their head. If they respond by calming, continue for 5 seconds or so then move away and give them the opportunity to go to sleep on their own.
13. If they are not responding to the stroking and mattress patting, try gently rubbing baby's chest or back.

14. Your baby may push your hand away. This is a signal they are trying to settle themselves, so give them some space but stay by the side of the cot to let them know you're still there if they need you.
15. If after about 5 seconds or so your baby is still not calming, and your baby uses a dummy, this may be the time to offer it.
16. If your baby doesn't use a dummy and is still not calming after offering around 5 seconds of each of these settling strategies, it's time to pick up your baby and offer them an upright cuddle till calm.
17. Once in your arms this is a great opportunity to assess whether these settling strategies are working. If they snuggle in, calm and recover quickly, your efforts have paid off. And if you're comfortable, you may like to try the entire process again. If they push away and take a bit longer to calm in your arms, this is your cue to end the experience and use your go-to tool to settle babe to sleep. You can try again at the next sleep so as to be consistent in continuing your sleep strategies.

If your baby is mostly calm or just grizzling through the settling process and you're comfortable, it's OK to persist with these strategies for about 20 to 30 minutes.

However if your baby is distressed and struggling to calm, offer only a short 'settling' experience of about 5 minutes, then slowly build up over the following days.

## Separation anxiety

*Separation anxiety is common around 8-9 months! Be prepared...*

All the good work you've done to help your baby anticipate sleep can sometimes become undone at this age! All of a sudden, your baby starts crying and protesting as you prepare them for sleep. Thank you, separation anxiety!

At around 7–9 months of age your baby will begin to understand the concept of 'object permanence' — the understanding that things (including you) still exist when out of sight.

Your baby may cry when you are gone as a result of this development. It is important to support them by recognising and responding to their cries for reassurance.

As frustrating as this can be for us as parents, object permanence is a good thing and forms part of your baby's attachment process and there are ways to anticipate and assist your baby through this period.

- From 7 months and onwards a **small** transition object can assist with separation anxiety, such as a small soft toy which can be given to your baby in their cot; but always keep head and face uncovered and make sure the toy doesn't have any buttons/batteries etc that could be a choking hazard.
- A great way to help them adjust and overcome separation anxiety at sleep time is to play lots of peek-a-boo games during their awake time — to show them that you go and then return!

If they do protest or wake during sleep time understand that it may be a cry of reassurance. By offering comfort you will help your baby feel safe and secure. Remember babies need help while they learn things and this phase will pass.

## Be aware of overtiredness

Overtired babies become overactive, agitated and miserable very easily, and if sleep doesn't happen quickly, they become distressed and very difficult to calm.

The window of opportunity between play and being overtired can be quite small for some babies, so always be on the lookout for your baby's tired signs.

Remember that when your baby's brain is preparing for sleep, their brain waves change. We see these changes as tired signs. The earlier these signs are acted on, the better the chance your baby has of drifting to sleep before becoming overtired

## To offer a dream feed or not?

Although some babies over 8 months can sleep through the night without needing a feed, many still can't. Both scenarios are normal. If your baby is still waking overnight, you may like to consider a dream feed.

A 'dream feed' is a feed that is offered at least 3 hours after the last feed your baby had before they were put to bed, usually just before you are going to bed at around 10 or 10.30pm. The idea is to help your baby 'top up' so they can potentially sleep longer overnight.

If you'd like to try a dream feed, make sure you keep the lighting low. Don't engage with your baby or change their nappy (unless it is dirty!)

Simply pick up your sleeping baby, offer them the feed, and then gently place them back into their cot.

Most babies settle back to sleep quite easily however, if your baby wakes and protests, try comforting them with a little shushing or stroking.

## A note on dummies



By this age your baby may or may not be using a dummy. While most dummy 'users' are old enough to feel around and find their dummy without your help, if your baby is not yet able to do so, you can help teach them by placing the dummy in their hand and showing them how they can move it to their mouth.

The other thing you can try to help curb a dummy addiction, is when your baby calls out in the middle of the night, start by offering some shushing instead of immediately placing the dummy back in their mouth. By offering them short, repetitive experiences to calm without their dummy, they'll rely on it less and less.



## Key things to remember...

- The reason many babies of this age cannot drift to sleep (or stay asleep) is because they have never learned — It's not because they are bad sleepers.
- Experience is how babies learn, so build on experiences little by little and give your baby the opportunity to learn the new experience over time and settle back to sleep between cycles without your help.
- By responding to your baby's needs, with gentle, warm and consistent caregiving, you are not spoiling them – you are supporting their learning and helping them develop a sense of trust and emotional security.
- Always seek medical attention if you think your baby is unwell.



## Products you might like to try...



### Jersey Sleeping Bag

Available in four TOGs, the Jersey Bag features a slim-fit in stretchy organic cotton jersey. Ideal is baby's first sleeping bag once they have transitioned out of a swaddle. Suitable for ages 3–24M.



### Sheeting Sleeping Bag

Also available in four TOGs, the Sheeting Bag features a looser fit and is made from luxurious organic cotton. Stretch panels in the sides, shoulders and arms allow for stretch and movement. Suitable for ages 3M–6Y.



### Long Sleeve Layer

Made from a deliciously soft, stretchy organic jersey cotton, these are comfortable and warm during sleep. Breathable, natural fibres help regulate body temperature and prevent overheating. Suitable for ages 0–24M.



### Window Blockout

This is the perfect solution for babies and toddlers who need total darkness in their room to sleep and dream the night away. A completely dark room during sleep will help stimulate melatonin production, be comforting for your baby, and help prevent early waking or late settling during summer and daylight saving.

**Next up...** Our 12–24 Month Guide will be released on 28/4/2021

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.