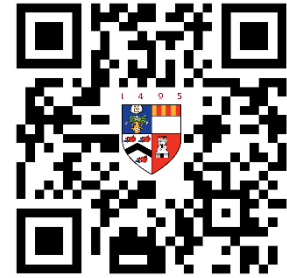




PARENTCRAFT
PODCASTS



Sleeping

Welcome to this podcast, my name is Dr Deborah Shanks and I am a consultant paediatrician in Raigmore Hospital in Inverness. This podcast has been developed as part of a parentcraft project with healthcare professionals and parents. This podcast is in addition to parentcraft education in your area and the Ready Steady Baby book that you will have received from your midwife.

This podcast aims to inform parents about sleep, to alleviate potential concerns and worries and help you to identify when to seek professional support.

You may be listening to this because you are having concerns about your baby's sleeping or you may be preparing yourself for what will happen after your baby is born. First of all I would say that we all need our sleep, babies and parents and it is important that you get as much help and information as you need. Some babies are naturally better sleepers than others, bear in mind that each baby is their own unique little person. Some are active little adventurers whilst others are placid take it all in their stride types. This is naturally going to influence how well they sleep also. This can give a parent a very different experience when taking care of their first infant when compared to other babies they may have. For example, a Mum who has an easy going personality may find their first baby who also has an easy going temperament pretty easy to manage. Then baby number two comes along with a more active curious personality and Mum then feels a bit out of her depth because what worked to help her first baby sleep, is not working with her second baby. It is not about doing anything wrong but about adjusting your parenting approach to the different needs of the baby. However there are things you can do to help you and your baby. Remember it is natural to get tired due to lack of sleep and looking for help is a sign that you are doing what is best for you and your baby.

What is normal?

Research shows that from birth for the first 4 weeks babies need about 16 to 18 hours of sleep a day but some babies haven't read that research! Each baby is different in some way but there are some general principles you may learn from. In the first six weeks there may be no routine and your baby may feed very frequently. Babies will often fall asleep when they are feeding and it is best to try and gently wake them up to try to get them to finish the feed, so that then after the winding and changing process, they may go down for a more settled nap.

By the age of 1 month babies are starting to notice the difference between light and dark and their hormone production is changing including the hormone Melatonin which is linked with sleep. Therefore they should be able to get into more of a day time/night time routine when they will sleep for slightly longer periods during the night. You can encourage this by teaching them the difference between day and night. This includes giving them social interaction during the day but when they wake at night, they should get fed, changed if needed and put back to sleep in a quiet manner. Keeping the lights dim when they wake at night also helps as this helps their brain know the different time of day. Be aware that lights from the TV and other screens also affect the production of the Melatonin hormone.

For the first six months your baby should be in the same room as you when they're asleep, both day and night. It is good for a baby to stretch out when they sleep in a cot and therefore best to try to limit the times when they sleep in a car seat or buggy and at night to have them in a cot beside your bed. Particularly in the early weeks, you may find that your baby only falls asleep in your or your partner's arms, or when you're standing by the cot. You can start getting your baby used to going to sleep without you comforting them by putting them down before they fall asleep or 20-30 minutes after they finish a feed. It may be easier to do this once your baby starts to stay alert more frequently or for longer. Keep in mind the world around your baby is changing. It is more interesting but it is also likely to leave your baby feeling unsettled at times. Parents can help the baby's nervous system relax in a number of ways, including through their reassuring presence, calm voice and/or touch.

Cot bumpers and bed sharing, particularly when parents smoke or have taken alcohol increase the risk of sudden infant death syndrome and are not recommended.

Around three months old you may feel ready to introduce a bedtime routine. Getting them into a simple, soothing bedtime routine can be helpful for everyone and can help prevent sleeping problems later on. It's also great one-to-one with your baby. Remember your baby is experiencing great change and uncertainty, it follows that they need lots of consistency and routine as well as physical contact from you. The routine could consist of having a bath and then putting them to bed with a bedtime story or singing a lullaby or having a wind-up musical mobile that you can turn on when you've put your baby to bed.

Leave your baby still awake, happy and relaxed in their cot and they will learn how to fall asleep on their own. Try to avoid getting them to sleep by rocking or cuddling them in your arms. If they get used to falling asleep in your arms, they may need nursing back to sleep if they wake up again.

As your child gets older, it can be helpful to keep to a similar bedtime routine. Too much excitement and stimulation just before bedtime can wake your child up again. Spend some time winding down and doing some calmer activities, like reading.

When should you ask for help with sleep and what are the possible causes of a baby with a poor sleep routine:

It is important if a baby, particularly if they have previously slept well, starts waking a lot, to make sure that they are not in pain or unwell. Signs of being unwell might be if they had some vomiting or diarrhoea, had a fever, seem unusually reluctant to move or their colour was poor, being very

pale or signs of blueness of the lips. In this situation you may need to get medical advice. It might be worth trying some Paracetamol particularly if they are teething. This will be covered more fully in a future pod cast on first aid.

Some babies never seem to get into a routine and if this is your baby then it is good to get help as there can be simple solutions. Calmness and consistency – that is doing the same thing each time is very important. It means you are predictable and this comforts your baby.

Can you imagine the wonder of seeing your hands for the very first time? At about 8-9 weeks old, most babies start to see shapes and patterns in the world around them, including their hands. This is a pretty exciting discovery when your world, as Dr Frans, author of Wonder Weeks describes it, has looked like a bowl of soup up until this point.

So how does this relate to sleep? Well first off, think of all the new things your baby has to learn now it has arrived in the world ...

Their brain goes through a series of developmental changes, or mental leaps, particularly in the first two years. Each mental leap allows your baby to understand and learn about themselves, you and their world a little better.

So if we think now of the baby who has just discovered his hands.

And yes you've guessed it ... they don't sleep as well during these stages of change. This often happens at times when you think you're on track and all of a sudden for no obvious reason, they don't sleep! All of the progress you've made feels like it has disappeared and it is easy to lose heart. This does not mean you are doing anything wrong. If what you were doing before was working, keep at it. Be as consistent as you can, as it is likely to work again once your baby has made the next mental leap. Hang in there. And be sure to try and get as much rest as you can. It's easier said than done, but try and nap when your baby naps so you are more rested to cope at night. Go and lie down for 30 minutes to 45 minutes just to recharge your batteries. Another time when this may be possible is perhaps when your partner comes home if they have been working or first thing in the morning before they go to work, and you can have a short lie in. A rested parent is a happy parent, which helps them to have happier children.

It is important to remember that babies do need a lot of sleep and they often want to go to bed early, say at 6.30pm or 7pm and then will be up early the next morning. You should look at the length a baby sleeps as being the main aim, rather than trying to get them to sleep longer in the morning. As babies naturally tend to wake early it is therefore best to go to bed early yourself and see 6am as a normal time to get up, rather than hoping that you will be able to sleep late. Babies do not understand weekends until they are teenagers, no I am kidding – maybe not till the age of 10, so getting a lie in at weekends after you have a baby is something that doesn't happen for a long time so it is best to get used to this new routine yourselves.

After you have tried these things if your baby is not sleeping well then it is worth speaking to your health visitor or GP to discuss other help.

Keep in mind that you cannot 'spoil' a baby with too much physical contact when they are small. It is not until your baby is about 18 months old, that they start to learn that they can choose how to behave. So the baby who is crying in the middle of the night, is not doing this to be difficult, although it may feel like it at the time! It could be that their little brain is too busy processing everything that they have learnt that day and cannot switch off. Much the same way we can't, if we've had too much caffeine too close to bedtime.

The reward for all these sleepless nights is having a happy child and family. Eventually you will have difficulty in getting them out of bed once they are teenagers and they will be keeping you awake at night for other reasons.

Hopefully this podcast has given you some information on what sleep is normal for a baby at different ages, the importance of having a good day-time and night-time routine. What you can do to try and help your baby sleep and how to look after yourself. If you are worried about your baby you should discuss this further with a health professional such as your midwife, health visitor or GP.

For more information on the project please visit
www.abdn.ac.uk/education/research/parentcraft.php

Useful sources of information

1. NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/>

2. NHS Highland Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/NHSHighland>

3. NHS 24

NHS 24 - Scotland's national Telehealth and Telecare organisation Call us free on 111 if you are ill and it can't wait until your regular NHS service reopens <http://www.nhs24.com/>

4. Highland sling library

<https://www.facebook.com/highlandslinglibrary>