

# early Intervention



## Recognizing Sleep Disorders in Your Infant

One of the most common concerns parents of young children bring to their pediatricians is connected to sleep behaviors. The infant or child who goes to bed unwillingly or wakes frequently through the night can be highly disruptive to the family. One of the problems we have in defining sleep behavior disorders is that there are important differences in sleep patterns that occur at different developmental stages. It might not be considered abnormal when a two-month-old infant wakes frequently in the night, but it is considered abnormal in a two-year-old child. Also, families may vary greatly in their tolerance of their children's sleeping habits, what one family finds problematic, another family may take as a matter of course.

The first thing to realize is that newborns don't sleep like adults or even toddlers. They sleep more and with a different pattern. A typical newborn sleeps 16 hours per day. That sleep is in short bursts of 30 minutes to three hours, and is distributed equally between night and day. By age one, a child is still sleeping about 14 hours per day, though that sleep is in longer, less frequent periods, and most of that sleep will be at night. Frequent waking is exhausting and frustrating for the parents, but still a normal part of infant development and not a sleep disorder.

There are two kinds of sleep disorders that can affect infants. *Parasomnias* are sleep disorders that interrupt sleep, such as sleepwalking and/or night terrors. These types of sleep disorders generally do not appear until a child is 18 months or older. Babies are far more likely to suffer from *dysomnias*, which are sleep disorders such as trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or getting restful sleep.

These sleep disorders are most common during an infant's transition to independent sleep. Babies learn self-soothing techniques which allow them to fall back to sleep if they wake in the night. Until they learn that skill, they require attention from their parents every time they wake up. There are things you can do which can speed your baby's acquisition of this independence.

1. Put the baby in bed when drowsy, but not when completely asleep.
2. Bedtime routines can be comforting and help a child become drowsy, but if they become dependent on them (such as not being able to sleep unless rocked), they won't learn self-soothing skills. Try to vary bedtime activities to reduce an infant's dependence on them.
3. When the baby wakes up, unless you know it is time for a feeding, don't respond right away. Often after a few minutes the child will settle down and fall back asleep.

No certain technique works for everyone. You may have to keep trying and see what works for your baby.

*continued on page 2*

### IN THIS ISSUE:

Recognizing Sleep Disorders in Your Infant	1
Do's and Don'ts for Teaching Your Child Good Sleep Habits	2
Books and Videos on Infant and Toddler Sleep Disorders	3
Preventing SIDS	3
The Calendar Ahead	4
Web Sites of Interest	4

# Do's and Don'ts for Teaching Your Child Good Sleep Habits

## DO:

- Make bedtime a special time. Interact with your child in a way that is secure and loving. Be firm and go through a certain bedtime routine that your child is used to. At the end of the routine turn the lights off and it is time to fall asleep.
- Keep to a regular daily routine – the same waking time, meal times, nap time and play times help the baby feel secure and comfortable and help with a smooth bedtime.
- Think hard about finding your child's ideal bedtime. Look for the time when your child is starting to slow down and get physically tired and begin getting them into bed *before* that time.
- Use a simple, regular bedtime routine. It should not last too long and should take place primarily in the room where the child will sleep. Include a few simple, quiet activities, such as a light snack, bath, cuddling, saying goodnight, and a story or lullaby.
- Make sure that the sleep routines you use can be used anywhere to help your child get to sleep wherever you may be.
- "White noise" devices may be useful, running fans or sound machines may not only block out distracting noises but may also simulate the sound babies hear in the womb.
- Use light to your advantage. Keep lights dim in the evening as bedtime approaches. In the morning, get your child into bright light. Light helps signal the brain into the right sleep-wake cycle.

## DON'T

- Never soothe your child asleep by putting them to bed with a bottle of juice, milk or formula. This can cause baby bottle tooth decay. Feed or nurse the baby then put them down to sleep.



- Don't start giving solids before about 6 months of age. If your baby gets solids before their system can digest them, they may sleep worse due to tummy aches.
- Don't fill your child's bed with toys. Too many toys in bed can be distracting. One or two transitional objects are okay and can also help with separation issues. Babies under 4-6 months should have an empty crib to prevent suffocation.
- Never use sending your child to bed as a threat. This should be a time for secure, loving interaction, not a punishment.
- Don't give your child foods and drinks with caffeine in them. Even caffeine earlier in the day can disrupt your child's sleep cycle.
- If your child has a television set in their bedroom, remove it. Research shows watching television is linked to sleep problems.

## Sleep Disorders by Age and Suggested Interventions

**Age 0 to 4 months.** Night waking and feeding are developmentally appropriate and there is little need to intervene.

**Age 4 to 12 months.** Night waking is treated by systematic ignoring and scheduled awakenings. If the infant is demanding nighttime feedings, it is useful to lengthen the interval before feeding, decreasing the volume and duration of the feeding and diluting the feeding.

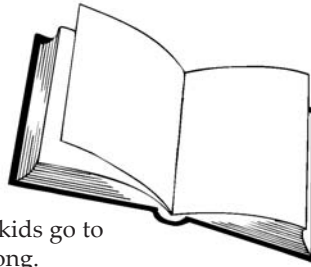
**Age 2 to 4 years.** Disorders of initiating and maintaining sleep are most common. Parents can develop predictable bedtime routines, set firm limits and develop a reward system for better sleep habits. This may be a good time to introduce "transitional objects" into the bedtime routine, such as a special stuffed animal, toy, or blanket. It is also a great time to begin reading stories to them before bed.

If sleep problems persist, you know your baby better than anyone, contact your physician immediately.

# Books and Videos on Infant and Toddler Sleep Disorders

## Books

***Baby & Toddler Sleep Solutions for Dummies.*** Arthur Lavin and Susan Glaser. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, 2007. (Call # WM 188 L412 2007). This guide provides information you need to help your kids go to sleep – and stay asleep – all night long.



***It's Time to Sleep In Your Own Bed.*** Lawrence E. Shapiro. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2008. (Call # WM 188 S529 2008). This compassionate children's book follows Alex as he struggles with his feelings about sleeping in his room, learns his bed is a special place and finally goes to sleep by himself in his own bed.

***The Sleepy Solution: The Exhausted Parent's Guide to Getting Your Child to Sleep – from Birth to Age 5.*** Jennifer Waldburger and Jill Spivak. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 2007. (Call # WM 188 .W157 2007). The authors provide a customized sleep plan, clear step-by-step instructions and emotional support as your child learns.

***Sleepless in America: Is Your Child Misbehaving or Missing Sleep?*** Mary Sheedy Kurcinka. New York: HarperCollins, 2006. (Call # WM 188 .K96s 2006) – Based on the personal experience of parents as well as up-to-date scientific research, this book focuses on the topic of sleep deprivation and its solutions as a way to look at child behavior and development issues.

***Teach Your Baby to Sleep: Solving Sleep Problems from Newborn Through Childhood.*** New York: Sterling Publishing, 2005. (Call # WM 188 .T253 2005). This book features the work of the Millpond Children's Sleep Clinic of England. Discover how to get your baby or child to settle easily and sleep through the night.

## Videos

***Helping Your Baby Sleep Through the Night.*** (23 minute DVD videodisc). [El Cerrito, CA]: Medical Center for Health Concerns, 2006. (Call # WM 188 H483 2006). This video shows how to help babies soothe themselves to sleep, hints for enhancing your child's sleep environment, how babies learn the differences between day and night and a gentle 4-night program to eliminate post-midnight feedings.

***The Sleepy Solution for Crib Sleepers.*** (97 minute DVD videodisc). Los Angeles: Sleepy Planet, 2007. (Call # WM 188 .W157d 2007). This video is a complement to the book described above. Highlights include the 6 sleep stealers that cause most sleep problems in children and a step-by-step guide to solving your child's nap and nighttime sleep problems.

***Your Baby Can Sleep.*** (24 minute DVD videodisc). Bethesda, MD: Better Health Video, 1998. (Call # WM 188 .Y81 1998). Pediatric sleep specialist Dr. Stuart Tomares presents a simple method to have a baby with sleep problems sleeping well in about a week.

## PREVENTING SIDS



One of the most serious worries during a baby's first year is the possibility of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), where some babies die in their sleep for no apparent reason. Although much about SIDS is still not clearly understood, there are some basic sleep habits that will minimize your infant's risk.

1. Babies should always be put to sleep on their backs. Studies have shown that this one step reduces the incidence of SIDS by up to 30%.
2. Make sure there are no pillows, stuffed animals, or comforters in the crib as the child could suffocate from them. Even a newborn who doesn't move around is at risk, for example, if a stuffed animal fell on his or her face. Swaddling a newborn in a light blanket is fine and often helps him or her stay asleep.
3. Don't make the room too warm and dress the baby as you would dress for bed.
4. Recent research has shown the benefits of placing a small fan in the infant's room, just to help circulate air in the room.

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## Calendar Ahead

### March 6-7, 2009

*6th Annual Piecing It All Together, Children's Mental Health Conference*  
Edwardsville, Illinois  
CONTACT: NAMI Madison County, 618-798-9788 or  
email: NAMI-PAIT@hotmail.com

### March 14, 2009

*4th Annual North of Eighty Parent Conference* • Rock Falls, Illinois  
CONTACT: HEAR/ISD, [http://morgan.k12.il.us/isd/reach\\_events.html](http://morgan.k12.il.us/isd/reach_events.html)

### April 2, 2009

*4th Annual South of Seventy Parent Conference* • Mt. Vernon, Illinois  
CONTACT: HEAR/ISD, [http://morgan.k12.il.us/isd/reach\\_events.html](http://morgan.k12.il.us/isd/reach_events.html)

### April 21, 2009

*The Arc of Illinois 59th Annual Convention* • Lisle, Illinois  
CONTACT: Janet Donahue, 815-464-1832

### April 25, 2009

*Illinois Family Leader Collaboration 3rd Annual Family Conference*  
East Peoria, Illinois  
CONTACT: STARNET, <http://www.wiu.edu/starnet> or 800-227-7537



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## USEFUL WEB SITES ON SLEEP DISORDERS

### Talk About Sleep

<http://www.talkaboutsleepp.com>

### University of Michigan Health System, Your Child Topics: Sleep Problems

<http://www.med.umich.edu/l libr/yourchild/sleep.htm>

### How to Do Things: Health Care & Wellness

<http://howtodothings.com/>

### National Sleep Foundation

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/>