

# CUMBERLAND CHILDREN'S MEDICAL GROUP

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## PREVENTING SLEEP PROBLEMS

### THE PROBLEM

Parents want their children to go to bed without resistance and sleep through the night. Parents look forward to a time when they can again have seven or eight hours of uninterrupted sleep. Newborns, however, have a limit on how many hours they can sleep, usually four or five. By 2 months of age, some 50% of infants can sleep through the night. By 4 months, most infants have acquired this capacity. It may not develop, however, unless you have a plan. Consider the following guidelines if you want to teach your baby that nighttime is a special time for sleeping, that his crib is where he stays at night, and that he can put himself back to sleep. It is far easier to prevent sleep problems before 6 months of age than it is to treat them later.

### THE SOLUTION

#### Newborns

Place your baby in the crib when he is drowsy but awake. This is very important; without it the other preventive measures will fail. Your baby's last waking memory should be of the crib, not of you or of being fed. He must learn to put himself to sleep without you. Don't expect him to go to sleep as soon as you put him down. It often takes 20 minutes of restlessness for a baby to fall asleep. If he is crying, rock him and cuddle him, but when he settles down, try to put him in the crib before he falls asleep. Handle naps the same way. This is when your child learns to put himself back to sleep after normal awakenings. Don't help him when he doesn't need any help.

Hold your baby for all fussy crying during the first three months. All new babies cry some during the day and night. Respond to a crying baby with gentle motion and cuddling. Babies can't be spoiled during the first three or four months of life.

Do not let your baby sleep for more than three consecutive hours during the day. Attempt to waken him gently and entertain him. In this way, the time when your infant sleeps the longest will occur during the night. Note: Many newborns can sleep five consecutive hours and can be taught to take this longer period of sleep at night.

Do not feed a bottle-fed baby if he cries less than two and a half hours after the last feeding (two hours for breast-fed babies). Crying is the only form of communication newborns have. Crying does not always mean your baby is hungry. He may be tired, bored, lonely, or too hot. Hold your baby at these times or put him to bed. Don't let feeding become a pacifier. Babies who feed too often during the day become hungry at frequent intervals during the night.

Make middle-of-the-night feedings brief and boring. You want your baby to think of nighttime as a special time for sleeping. When he awakens at night for feedings, don't turn on the lights, talk to him, or rock him. Feed him quickly and quietly. Provide extra rocking and playtime during the day. This approach leads to longer periods of sleep at night.

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Don't awaken your baby to change diapers during the night except when they are soiled or you are treating a bad diaper rash. If you must change your child, use as little light as possible (a flashlight, for example), do it quietly, and don't provide him with any entertainment.

While it is not harmful for your child to sleep with you, you probably will not get a restful night's sleep. So why not teach him to prefer his own bed? Don't let your baby sleep in your bed. Once he is used to sleeping with you, moving him to his own bed is extremely difficult. For the first two or three months, you can keep your baby in a crib or bassinet next to your bed if you wish.

Choose a late bedtime (10 p.m. or 11 p.m.) and give the last feeding then. Try to keep your baby awake for the two hours before bedtime. Going to bed at the same time every night helps him develop good sleeping habits.

### **2-month-old babies**

Move your baby's crib to a separate room. By 3 months of age, your baby should be sleeping in a separate room. This helps parents who are light sleepers to sleep better. Also, your baby may forget that her parents are available if she can't see them when she awakens. If separate rooms are impractical, at least put up a screen or cover the crib railing with a blanket so that your baby can't see your bed.

Try to delay middle-of-the-night feedings. By this age, your baby should be down to just one feeding during the night. Before preparing a bottle, try holding your baby briefly to see if that will be enough to satisfy him. If you must feed him, give one or two ounces less of formula than you would during the day. If you are breast-feeding, nurse for less time at night. As your baby gets close to 4 months of age, try nursing on just one side at night. Never awaken him for a nighttime feeding except at your bedtime.

### **4-month-old babies**

Try to discontinue the 2 a.m. feeding before it becomes a habit. By 4 months of age, a bottle-fed baby does not need to be fed more than four times a day. Breast-fed babies do not need more than five nursing sessions a day. If you don't eliminate the night feeding at this time, it will become more difficult to stop as your child gets older. Remember to give the last feeding at 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. If your child cries during the night, comfort him with a back rub and some soothing words instead of with a feeding.

Don't allow your baby to hold his bottle or take it to bed with him. Babies should think that the bottle belongs to the parents. A bottle in bed leads to middle-of-the-night crying because the baby inevitably reaches for the bottle and finds it empty or missing because it has fallen to the floor.

Make middle-of-the-night contacts brief and boring. Comfort your child as little as possible between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. All children have four or five partial awakenings each night. They need to learn how to go back to sleep on their own. If your baby cries for more than five minutes, visit him but don't turn on the light, play with him, or take him out of his crib. Comfort him with a few soothing words and stay for less than one minute. This brief contact usually isn't enough to encourage your baby to keep waking you.