



Nurturing Sleep Solutions Top 5 Sleep Tips!

Sleep is a “big” topic! What I mean by that is everyone seems to have an opinion about your little one’s sleep and it is often a topic used to break the ice in many

conversations. So often you hear “are they sleeping well?” or “my baby slept “x” amount of hours when they were this age!” It is frustrating because every baby is SO DIFFERENT! Yes, there can be averages but in general each baby is unique and so sleep might differ from that of another baby the same age.

There are a few factors or tips that can be implemented that help improve sleep in the majority of infants. Little factors that are often overlooked but can make the biggest difference! I am going to list my top 5 sleep tips which include these factors and I will explain why they work for the majority of babies!

1. A dark room environment.

Newborn babies like to sleep in environments that remind them of being in the womb. Creating a dark sleep space actually gives them a feeling of familiarity and helps them feel safe during their womb to world transition. The womb was dark and so darkness is associated with a feeling of safety. When a baby feels safe they are able to relax and sleep better!

Following the [4 month sleep regression](#) where babies go from being a newborn to having more established sleep cycles darkness is what triggers melatonin (sleep hormone) production. A human body will produce the highest amount of sleep hormone when it is an appropriate sleep time and when it is dark. There are many infants and children who will sleep with lots of daytime light but melatonin production is suppressed and so the sleep may not be as restful.

Babies are easily stimulated by the smallest light levels and even light coming in from the side of black out blinds can be enough to confuse sleep hormone production. Our goal is to have the room pitch black so that we can help their bodies know what to do! Darkness = sleep hormone production!

**** Common Sleep Myth:** Having my baby sleep with lots of light and noise will help them sleep through anything! Unfortunately this is not true. Having light in the sleep environment makes it harder for their little body's to produce enough sleep hormones for restful sleep periods.

2. Follow the 30/60 Rule

This is one "rule" that I put in all of my sleep plans and it falls along the same lines as tip #1. The body's sleep/wake hormones are stimulated the most by natural light levels. Artificial light plays a roll but not as much as natural light.

Because we want those sleep hormones to be highest before naps and nights we want to make sure we give the body enough time to switch over from awake hormones to sleep hormones. We can do this by coming inside out of the natural light before naps and nights to help make it easier for our little ones.

Try and be inside 30 minutes before a nap and 60 minutes before night sleep. We are just helping the body transition to a sleep period. Once inside close any blinds that are letting in a lot of light and also turn off any lights that aren't needed. If there is a T.V in the area on I would also turn this off for the short while before sleep.

3. Use White Noise

Newborns like to sleep in environments that remind them of being in the womb! We talked about this in tip #1 with the womb being dark but the womb is also very loud. There is continuous blood flow happening around the womb and so while in utero a baby hears a constant loud hum. Replicating this sound for your new baby can help give them that feeling of familiarity and help them feel safe.

Following the 4 month sleep regression your baby now has longer sleep cycles that are broken into different phases. At the end of the cycle they experience a brief awakening where they assess their surroundings to make sure everything is consistent to when they fell asleep at the beginning of the night. Using white noise helps to create consistency in their environment. If it is playing when they fall asleep then there is a good chance when they wake at the end of the sleep cycle to assess their surroundings the white noise can send the message that everything is good to go and they can slip into the next sleep cycle!

- Have the noise play for the entire nap period and all night
- Turn off the noise when it is time to get up so it remains a sleep cue
- Choose a sound with a steady tone such as heavy rainfall, white noise, static

4. Establish Sleep Routines

Routines are so important and often overlooked. They make up such a big part of sleep for all ages. I always stress routines because it establishes predictability for infants/toddlers/children and because your little one can't tell time! If they could tell time on the clock it would be a whole different ball game because the time would be telling them what they are supposed to be doing. As adults we might be feeling fine and then look at the clock and it says 10:00 p.m. and so we begin yawning. The clock cued our body to prepare for sleep. This is what routines do for children.

We want routines to flow from most stimulating down to least stimulating. This sounds obvious but I would say 90% of the time they don't. For example, if after the bath you take your baby to their room for lotion and p.j.'s and then go to the living room to give kisses goodnight we have just moved in the "wrong" direction for stimulation levels. How we would want to do it is instead right after bath go out to living room to give kisses and then go into the room and finish the rest of the routine. Once in the bedroom we want to stay in there as this is now sleep time.

Routines work best if done exactly the same every single day. It doesn't matter what time your little one is going down, where they are going down or who is putting them down. Those steps in the routine are telling the body to produce sleep hormone and prepare for sleep so we don't want to skip any of them. One way the routine might change is how long it takes. For example, one day you might have more time and so the bath is 15 minutes but the next day you have less time and so it is 5 minutes. That is fine but we want all the steps in place each day. If we take a step out then it is natural for your baby to keep "waiting" for it and this makes it harder for them to fall asleep.

AGE	ROUTINES
Birth - 4 Months	<u>Nap:</u> Go into sleep environment, dim lights and turn on white noise, swaddle your baby, hum a lullaby, put them down how you do
	<u>Bedtime:</u> Go into sleep environment, dim lights and turn on white noise, swaddle your baby, hum a lullaby, put them down how you do
5-8 Months	<u>Nap:</u> Pick them up and say "it's time for sleep", go into sleep environment, dim lights and turn on white noise, change, put in sleep sack, hum a lullaby for 1 minute, put them down how you do
	<u>Bedtime:</u> Dinner, light play, bath, dim lights and white noise, p.j's & lotion massage, nurse/bottle, put them in sleep sack, hum a lullaby for 1 minute, put them down how you do
9-12 Months	<u>Nap:</u> Pick them up and say "it's time for sleep", go into sleep environment, dim lights and turn on white noise, change, put in sleep sack, read 1 story, hum lullaby for 1 minute, put them down how you do
	<u>Bedtime:</u> Dinner, light play, bath, dim lights and white noise, P.j's & lotion massage, nurse/bottle, put them in sleep sack, read 1 book, hum lullaby for 1 minute, put them down how you do
13-18 Months	<u>Nap:</u> Take them to their room and say "it's time for sleep", dim lights and turn on white noise, read 1-2 books, hum a lullaby for 1 minute, put them down how you do
	<u>Bedtime:</u> Dinner, light play, bath, dim lights and white noise, p.j's & lotion massage, nurse/bottle (if still having), read 2 books, sing a song, hum lullaby for 1 minute, put them down how you do
18+ months	<u>Nap:</u> Say "it's time for sleep", dim lights and turn on white noise, read 2 books, sing a song, kiss goodnight
	<u>Bedtime:</u> Dinner, light play, bath, brush teeth, say goodnight and give hugs to others in the house, dim lights and turn on white noise, put on p.j's, read 2 books, sing a song, kiss goodnight.

5. Don't Let Your Baby Become Overtired

As many of us parents know an overtired baby does not sleep well! They resist falling asleep, take short naps, wake many times in the night and/or wake up early in the morning (before 6 is too early!). The reason being overtired has such a negative impact on sleep is because it often creates a vicious cycle that is hard to get out of! For example, your baby woke up from a short nap and so they are tired from not sleeping that well and then we keep them up until next nap time

and so they are overtired from staying awake a long time after a short nap and this repeats until bedtime. Then your baby is going down for the night with a higher than normal stress hormone level from the sleep debt that accumulated during the day. Stress hormone is released as a “fight or flight” response to keep us awake during our second wind and this is why bedtime can be a struggle or why your baby might wake up within an hour of going down. This causes more night wakings as the body has a harder time settling (especially during the hours after midnight!) throughout the night. Now when your baby wakes up in the morning they are tired from waking up many times in the night and the cycle starts over again. Pheewf, another long day!

Some ways we can prevent our baby from becoming overtired:

- Follow wake times versus set sleep times. As mentioned above, babies can't tell time and so when we follow set times on a clock for sleep the only person this is consistent for is you. Babies do have sleep/wake cycles based off of a 24 hour clock but each day might be different and so we can use wake times to make sure there is consistency every day. Babies love consistency! For example, if your baby's wake time was 2 hours in the morning then if they woke at 7 this would mean asleep for first nap at 9 but if they woke at 6:30 the first nap would be 8:30. To their body this is exactly the same time because they were awake for the same length of time on both days. This helps them be able to create sleep/wake cycles. For babies even on 1 nap we are still essentially “sleeping around the clock” as there is daytime sleep and nighttime sleep and so using consistent wake times is beneficial. Once all sleep is consolidated to nighttime and there are no more naps then it makes more sense to have a set bedtime on the clock such as 7 p.m. because that will make every day the same.
- Follow the tips above to help your baby fall asleep quickly and not resist sleep for so long that they become more tired.
- See chart below!

Age	Maximum Awake Time
0-1 month	Duration of last sleep time up to a max of 45 minutes
1-2 months	Duration of last sleep time up to a max of 45-60 minutes
2-3 months	Duration of last sleep time up to a max of 60-80 minutes
3 months	1.5 hours MAX
4 months	1.75 MAX
5 months	2.25 hours MAX
6 months	2.5 hours MAX
7 months	2.75 hours MAX (3 naps) 3 hours MAX (2 naps)
8-9 months	3.25 hours MAX
10-11 months	3.5 hours MAX
12 months till 2-1 nap transition	3.75-4 hours MAX
1 Nap	Equal wake times as much as possible

**** Nurturing Sleep Solutions wake time chart to follow.** Find your baby's age to see that MAX awake time. We want to be under this if we can so go 15 minutes lower. Example, at 6 months I would stick with 2.25 hours. The first nap of the day we want 15 minutes less than the rest as this nap is an extension of night sleep. Example, at 6 months the wake time before the first sleep period would be 2 hours.

**** Look at the next month to see where you should be as your baby gets older.** Halfway through each month wake times will increase and "meet in the middle" of the two.

Although there are many factors that play into healthy sleep these are some common ones that can help make a difference. In all of my plans I work on foundations that include the above tips before jumping into any sort of sleep "coaching." It is essential to get all of the little pieces of the sleep puzzle in order first and then once that is done you can move on to coaching if it is needed.

Whether you are going to implement the above tips or other strategies you prefer be sure to have 100% consistency. Babies learn through consistent actions. If you do implement something new then give it a week to see if it is helping as they may just need a little longer to adapt to the change!

Thank you for reading my top 5 sleep tips! For more sleep information follow my blog at www.nurturingsleepsolutions.com

