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PARENTING WITH CONFIDENCE



sleep concerns - baby

Around one-third of babies experience excessive disrupted sleep. Common problems include extended crying when first put to bed and, sometimes, later during the night. Parents can use various strategies to help their baby settle and sleep better. A tired or crying baby can be stressful for parents, who need help and support networks.

Young babies have tiny stomachs and need to feed frequently, even during the night. This wouldn't be such a problem for exhausted parents if the baby drifted back to sleep straight after a feed, but this isn't always the case. Some babies remain distressed and continue to cry for hours.

There are various strategies parents can use to help their baby to sleep better. Persistent problems may need professional advice.

Check for obvious distractions

Your baby may be tired but distracted by physical discomfort. Always check for the following:

- Wet or dirty nappy
- Hunger
- Thirst, particularly in warm weather
- Overheating, particularly in winter when parents are more likely to add extra blankets to the cot
- Being too cold
- Environmental distractions such as noises, bright lights or television
- Pain, such as earache or teething.

Signs of tiredness

It can be helpful to watch for 'cues' or signs that your baby may give you to indicate tiredness. These include:

- Changes in facial expression
- Minimal movements and little activity
- Grimacing or frowning
- Grizzling
- Sucking
- Clenched fists
- Jerky movements
- Crying
- Yawning
- Staring
- Rigid limbs.

When you see some of these tired signs, it is time for your baby to go to bed.

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Relaxation for your baby

It helps to soothe and relax your baby before you put them to bed for the night. Suggestions include:

- **Warm bath and baby massage** – if possible use organic skincare.
- **Soft music** – perhaps play classical music with the lights dimmed, or a music box. Repetitive soft songs can also be very reassuring for the baby.
- **Cuddling** cradle your baby in your arms and talk softly to them.
- **Wrapping** some babies under the age of four months feel more secure and cosy if they are gently wrapped in a light blanket. They are also less likely to jerk themselves awake. Make sure their arms are free and they can still put their hands up to their mouth.
- **Patting** gently patting your baby on the side or bottom while they are in their cot might help to soothe them. Pat them long enough to soothe them, but not until they go to sleep.
- **Dummy** some babies are soothed by comfort sucking.

Night-time feeds

The aim is to feed your baby and get them back to sleep as quickly as possible, so that you can go back to bed. Suggestions include:

- Set up everything you will need before you go to bed (such as a fresh nappy and wipes).
- Don't leave your baby crying for long or they will be too distressed to feed properly.
- Keep the lights low and your voice to a whisper.
- Don't play with your baby and keep activity to a minimum.
- Return your baby to bed after the feed.

Learned behaviour

In your attempts to get your baby to sleep, you may have established habits such as always rocking or feeding your baby to sleep. Some babies can become reliant on particular strategies that parents use and learn that this is part of going to sleep. They might resist any change to their routine. Decide on a new and manageable pre-bed routine for your baby and stick to it. Your baby will adapt in time.

Change may be a challenge for you and your baby

If you decide to change your patterns and help your baby learn to sleep by themselves, your baby may cry to express discomfort with the change. Change to their familiar routine may prompt resistance. Be patient.

If your new routine doesn't seem to be working, don't lose hope and revert back to your old methods. Check that you are sure about what you are doing, persist and remember that your baby will soon become familiar with the new routine. Seek professional advice and reassurance if necessary.

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