

There's no denying that parenting is exhausting work. But having a baby doesn't have to mean resigning yourself to months (and years) of sleepless nights. Armed with a bit of expert knowledge, you can help your little one sleep better—so you can catch a few zzzzs, too.

Find Your Baby's Sleep Number

According to sleep expert Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, M.D., late bedtimes cause many childhood sleep problems, because overtiredness makes it harder for children to get to sleep and stay asleep. But figuring out when to put your baby to bed can be tough.

To find your baby's perfect bedtime, first determine how many hours of sleep he needs in a 24-hour period to determine how many hours they can comfortably stay awake per day. Set your child's bedtime so that he is not awake longer than that, and you'll prevent overtiredness that can wreck nighttime sleep.

For example, a ten-month-old who needs 14 hours of daily sleep can stay awake for 10 hours per day. If he gets up at 6am and naps for 3 hours each day, he needs a standing 7pm date with his bed. (*Hint: Newborns need between 14 and 16 hours of shut-eye per day; tots one to three years old need 12-14 hours, and kids three to six need 10-12 hours.*)

Nix The Nightlight

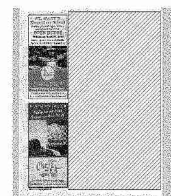
You may love the way your baby's smile lights up a room, but when it comes to sleep, the best light is no light at all. Nighttime light disrupts melatonin production, and even a small nightlight or the light from the baby monitor can be enough to prevent deep, restful sleep. Dim the house lights after dinner and install effective blackout blinds to get the bedroom truly dark. A black twin-sized flat sheet can be folded in half and tacked around a window in a pinch.

Embrace Boring

Sleep doctors agree that an effective bedtime routine is one that's absolutely set in stone: the same things, in the same order, every night. "Our bodies love routine, and this is especially so with children and bedtime," says Teitelbaum. Performing the same events in the same sequence before bed cues a child's subconscious for sleep. Sure, a routine this solid is bound to get boring for you. But the routine is for their sake, not yours (and a happily snoozing child is well-worth the effort).

Practice The Pacifier

Pediatrics reports that nearly 70 percent of parents give pacifiers to their newborns. And it's likely that a good portion of these parents find themselves getting up at night to replug their baby's lost binky. The sooner a child learns to manage his or her



own pacifier, the better everyone sleeps. Incorporate "paci practice" into tummy time and playtime, and your baby will be self-plugging in no time.

Start Sunny Side Up

For an easier bedtime, start your baby's day off the bright way. Strong morning light helps set your child's internal clock so they'll fall asleep more easily come nightfall. Open curtains to let the light shine in, and serve breakfast in a sunny spot. When weather permits, take a quick stroll around the block.

Atta Baby

Many experts advise putting babies to bed drowsy but awake, to support independent sleep skills. It's true, learning to fall asleep in bed will help your child learn to sleep longer stretches, and eventually, sleep through the night. But many babies won't tolerate being put down awake. Help your baby learn to love her crib by using rhythmic patting to soothe her after placing her in bed, without picking her back up. Because infants should be placed to sleep face-up, you might not be able to pat your child's back, so pat the crib mattress or the shoulder instead.

Avoid Nap Traps

Naps are important to babies and young children — they promote healthy nighttime rest, and new research from Emory University shows that they help babies learn and retain new information. But napping all day is guaranteed to make your baby nocturnal. To promote healthy naps while preserving nighttime sleep, don't allow naps longer than 3 hours. For most babies and young children, naps of an hour or two are long enough to be restorative without robbing nighttime sleep.

Get Baby Moving

Moving all day can help your baby sleep all night. A body in motion is one that's primed for sleep, because exercise helps children fall asleep faster and sleep more soundly. So put away your stroller and carrier and let your little one move. Aim for at least 60 minutes per day of vigorous activity. Toddlers and young children need plenty of chances to walk and run; babies need lots of time on their tummies and backs to wiggle, stretch, and work their muscles.

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