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Tips for Getting You New Baby to Sleep Alone - Without Wearing Yourself Out in the Process!

Topics Covered:

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Tips for Getting You New Baby to Sleep Alone - Without Wearing Yourself Out in the Process!

Impose and Stick to A Routine

There are many joys to being a new parent. Most new parents will agree, however, that one of the less than pleasant aspects of having a newborn is in dealing with the baby's sleep habits. A newborn baby will, of course, want to sleep a lot, which is completely natural. The difficult thing, though, is that the child needs to learn to sleep on his or her own. Until your newborn learns to go to sleep on his own, you will spend many sleepless nights tending to him when he wakes in the night.

Good baby sleep tips involve developing a routine with your newborn at a young age, which helps ease the transition into more adult sleep habits.

It can be tempting, when dealing with a newborn, to succumb to the habit of allowing the baby to dictate his or her own sleeping habits entirely. As much as is reasonable, you should try to avoid this, and instead try and establish a routine in which your baby sleeping habits begin to mimic those of the rest of the household.

Developing a routine for your baby's sleep should follow two different tracts: first, you should be putting your baby to sleep in the same fashion each and every night. A typical routine would involve a feeding and changing, combined with some time for play. You should put your child to sleep at a point where he is tired, but still aware of what's going on. In this way, you establish the precedent that he falls asleep on his own, without you holding him or being in the room. This is crucial to ensuring better sleep habits for him down the road.

The second thing is to try and mold your baby's sleep habits. For example, you should discourage extensive napping throughout the day, as that increases the chance that the baby will be unable to sleep throughout the night. In a similar fashion, if he sleeps in too late during the morning hours, you should rouse him.

No parent wants to interfere with their baby's sleeping habits too extensively, and it is natural to want to avoid having to wake your baby up when he is sleeping, or to prevent him from napping when he wishes to do so. There are, however, subtler methods with which to direct your child's sleep patterns. For example, when your baby naps, you should make sure that he does so in a brightly lit room - this ensures that he won't nap for long periods of time, which will affect his nighttime sleep.

There is a tendency amongst parents to make their baby as comfortable as possible when napping, which is, of course, entirely natural. But keep in mind that when you draw the curtains or turn out the light when your baby is napping, you are creating an environment where he is likely to nap for a long time, which isn't really helpful.

In general, you should think of an overall plan to develop sleeping routines for your baby that are in sync with those of the rest of the household. If you do this, you will find that not only your baby, but you yourself, will be getting a good night's rest.

Some Tricks for the Transition

As a new parent, one of your priorities will be to establish good sleeping habits with your newborn. Your baby needs to learn to sleep on his own; the transition from sleeping with his mother to sleeping by himself takes some time. Of course, as an added bonus, if you get your baby to learn to sleep on his own you will also get some much needed rest yourself.

Many baby sleep tips center on the idea of establishing routines and associations for your child between nighttime and sleep. The sooner your child begins to associate bedtime with sleep, the more likely he is to be able to go to sleep without a fuss. A period that is often overlooked, however, in establishing day vs. night associations, is the period of "transition" - that is, the one between being awake and falling asleep. Here are some transitioning techniques to try:

Try what is sometimes called "fathering down." Just before placing the baby into bed, the father should cradle the baby in such a way that the baby's head rests on the father neck. The father should then talk gently to the child. Because the male's voice is much deeper than the female's, babies are often more soothed by it, and will fall asleep more easily after being exposed to it for some time.

You can also try what is sometimes referred to as "wearing down." This is effective if your baby has been active throughout the day and is too excited to go to bed easily. All you have to do is place your baby in a sling or carrier - "wear him" in other words - for about half an hour before his bedtime. Simply go about your regular household activities: being close to a parent and slowly rocked about before bedtime will provide your child with an easier transition from being awake to being asleep.

Finally, if you've exhausted other options, you can go for the tried and true method of "driving down." Most parents are probably familiar with this as a last resort: place your baby in the car and drive around for awhile until he falls asleep. This one, while inconvenient, usually works every time, and if you desperately need some sleep it can be a godsend.

Obviously, you don't want to do things like drive around every night to get your child to sleep. Nor do you want to have to carry him around in a sling. The idea, though, is to start with these more drastic techniques and then slowly ease out of them. Keep in mind what a major transition your baby is going through when he is tiny: he's never slept on his own before. He simply doesn't know how to transition himself from being awake to being asleep. By employing these transition techniques you will be slowly teaching him

how to do so, and as they are gradually removed your baby will learn good sleeping habits, which will ensure that both you and your child get a good night's rest.

Feeding During the Day

One thing you should consider when trying to get your newborn to sleep better at night is what his/her feeding habits are. Oftentimes the child will be active and otherwise busy during the day, and won't be doing a lot of feeding. The problem with this, of course, is that he/she will then wake you repeatedly throughout the night for feedings.

A good technique, then, for getting your baby to sleep better at night is to "tank up" during the day. Try feeding every three hours during the day. This will not only ensure that your child's appetite is satisfied for the night, but will create an important association: you want your child to associate feeding with the daytime. If your child does wake up in the night for a feeding, try to get him to do one full feeding the first time he wakes up. If you don't do this, you encourage him to "snack" throughout the night - i.e. wake you up every couple hours.

Again, it is important to understand these baby feeding tips should not be taken as hard and fast rules, but rather as guidance. Ultimately you always want to go with your parental instincts. However, you want to create both daytime and sleep associations for your child. You want him to associate feeding and play with something that happens during the day, and lullabies and baths as something that happens at night, before bed. By doing this you ease the transition between sleep and wakefulness, which is the ultimate goal in terms of putting your child to bed easily.

If, however, your child doesn't want to feed every three hours, don't force him. Similarly, don't force a full feeding when you wake him at night. Rather, think of the bigger picture: by creating general habits and associations for your child, you will ensure a hasty and healthy sleep development.

Keeping Your Baby Relaxed Throughout the Day

While you ultimately can't control when or how your baby sleeps, you can, in many ways, stack the deck in your favor. In terms of baby sleep tips, a good one is making sure that your baby spends his daytime hours in a relaxed and peaceful state.

Going from a state of being awake to one of sleep is a big transition, and one that requires some time. Most of us are probably familiar with the fact that the more "awake" you are when you try to go to bed the longer it will take to fall asleep - that is, the wider

the gap in the transition between being awake and asleep, the longer it will take to achieve sleep. The same is true, of course, for your baby.

It is important, therefore, to encourage restful and peaceful days for your child. Particularly in the time leading up to bed, you want create an extremely relaxed and stress-free environment for your baby. By doing so you will be helping to create a situation for your baby where the transition from wakefulness to sleep is as easy as possible. If your baby spends much of his day being held and rocked and kept otherwise peaceful, it's likely that this will carry through into the night, and he will fall asleep easily.

If, on the other hand, your baby spends his day in stressful situations - if he is on his own a lot, for example, and has to cry for a while to be tended to - it's likely that this will carry over into the night as well, making it difficult for him to fall asleep. Although it may seem a little strange, babies are like adults in that a stressful day will make it difficult for them to sleep - just keep in mind that your baby's stresses are very different than yours, though no less valid in terms of a good night's rest.

Another thing that sometimes helps to keep your baby in a restful state is the use of a baby sling. Babies who spend a large part of their day being carried in a sling often sleep better than those who don't. Whether you use a sling or not, the general rule you should be trying to employ is to be with your baby throughout the day. Babies that spend a lot of time in the arms of their mothers are generally more relaxed and sleep better. Remember that when your baby is left on his own in his crib, it is often very stressful for him, and babies that spend their days like this often don't sleep well.

Setting a Bedtime Ritual

One very important thing you must do as soon as possible is establish a bedtime ritual for your baby. The reason that your newborn doesn't sleep well through the night at first is because he is used to falling asleep with his mother. When he awakes in the night he naturally cries for his mother - the only way he knows how to go back to sleep.

As your newborn grows older a slow transition will occur whereby he learns to go to sleep on his own, and - more importantly - when he wakes in the night he can learn to fall back asleep on his own. Your goal as a parent is to try and speed up this transition as much as possible, the result will not only be a good night's rest for you, but a development of better sleeping habits for your child in the long term.

To get your child to sleep well on his own, focus on a consistent bedtime routine. Babies are very dependant on routines - their world is so narrow that they generally focus on only a few things throughout the day - the way to create transitions in their day, therefore, is to change how these things are presented to them.

For example, your bedtime routine may consist of a warm bath, a feeding and changing, and some rocking before bed. If you repeat this every night your baby will slowly begin to associate these things with sleep. Every night, then, your child will naturally start to fall into a "sleeping mode" when you do these things. If you are inconsistent, however - if, say, you only bathe him on odd nights, or change the order of bedtime events - you will confuse the child and he will be unsure of what happens next: he won't know whether he's going to sleep after his bath, or being read a story.

A bedtime routine should also employ spending a good amount of time with your baby. Even from a very young age, babies will learn to manipulate their parents, and if you don't spend enough time with your baby before he falls asleep, he will start to stretch out the bedtime ritual in order to spend more time with you.

In establishing a bedtime ritual for your child, your primary concerns should be to make it consistent. To ensure better sleeping habits for your baby, don't focus so much on what you do before bed, rather, pay attention to doing the same things in the same order every night.

Develop a Reasonable Attitude

Before we go any further in this discussion about how you should get your baby to sleep, it is important that you, yourself, have a realistic and healthy attitude towards sleep. One of the keys to success in getting your child to go to sleep and sleep well through the night is understanding that you should be developing a long term goal, in terms of your baby's sleep habits. As much as your short term goal may simply be to get your child to go to sleep, so that you can get some sleep yourself, you should be thinking of the long term goal of instilling healthy sleep habits in your child.

A successful way to implement this goal is to be realistic and flexible. Your child is not going to sleep the same way or in the same manner every night. What you should be trying to do, therefore, is creating an environment that is conducive to sleep, so that your child can slowly learn to fall asleep on his/her own.

The best thing you can do is help your child develop an attitude in which sleep is both an enjoyable and secure state. Your child should think of sleep as a comforting thing that comes naturally. One way you can help foster this idea is by avoiding too much interference with your child's sleeping habits. Although it can be tempting to follow guides and implement rigid rules regarding your child's sleep, in many cases this can cause problems down the road.

If you rouse or put your child to bed at set hours, you may achieve a short term goal of getting some rest, but you may also be altering your child's attitudes towards sleep. Instead of thinking of sleep as an enjoyable activity, he will begin to think of it as

something he "has to do" like eating his dinner. By altering your child's attitude towards sleep in this way - by making him think of it as a task rather than an enjoyable activity - you risk problems developing later.

In older children and adults who have sleeping problems, doctors can often trace the source of the problem back to sleeping habits enforced at an extremely young age. If as a baby the subject was put to bed at a set hour, for example, regardless of whether he was tired or not. By trying to stay more in tune with how your baby is feeling and what he wants, you will encourage a healthier attitude towards sleep, which will benefit both you and your child in the future.

Making Your Baby Comfortable

Often, it seems fairly random whether or not babies sleep well. New parents will often discuss how they were simply "lucky" with one child as opposed to another. While it is true that in many cases how your child sleeps is largely out of your control, there remain many baby sleep tips you can employ to encourage better sleeping habits. One of the most important is to ensure that your baby is comfortable when he/she goes to sleep.

Bedtime is a transitional period for your child, and your efforts to make him sleep better should revolve around getting him to learn to sleep on his own. One of the most important elements of achieving this is to create an environment where your baby is as comfortable as possible. For this reason, the before-bed routine should always consist of changing and feedings - the worst thing for a baby, in terms of sleeping well, is to be in want of something when he is put to bed.

You should also be trying to make your baby as physically comfortable as possible when putting him to sleep. One of the most commonly overlooked aspects of this is allowing your baby to breathe easily through the nose. Most people, but especially babies, depend on clear nasal passages for a good night's sleep. It's important to remove all airborne allergens in the baby's nursery: everything should be well dusted, and you should keep dust collecting items - like fuzzy blankets and stuffed animals - to a minimum. When your baby is very young it takes time for him to learn to breathe through his mouth, so you must carefully pay attention to his nasal breathing when putting him to sleep. If you notice the problem is persistent, you may benefit from installing an air filter in the room that is designed to remove dust particles and allergens - this also has the added bonus of creating a soothing hum that will help many babies sleep better.

You should also pay particular attention to your baby's clothing. All babies are different in terms of their preferences, and you have to watch them closely. In many cases, things that look comfortable to you - very snug outfits, for example - may not be comfortable for your particular baby. Try both tight and loose fitting clothes and see which ones your baby seems to prefer.

Finally, consider how well your baby sleeps with wet diapers. Most babies will sleep well through the night with a wet diaper, but some will not. If this is the case, you can often solve your baby's sleeping difficulties by giving him a change in the night.

The main thing to keep in mind in terms of your babies comfort is to pay close attention, and to trust your instincts. Although it is tempting to follow guides and stick to hard and fast rules, remember that the adage "mother knows best" is generally true. So if your baby seems uncomfortable in his clothes, don't hesitate to change him into something that doesn't "look" as comfortable. If you trust your own judgments over those of guides in terms of your baby's comfort, it's likely that he will sleep much better.

Create a Familiar Environment

One of the things you must do as a parent is help create the best environment for your baby to fall asleep on his own.

Many people naturally assume that the best environment for sleep is one of total silence: most of us are familiar with having to tiptoe around a sleeping baby's room. Although a quiet environment is the best one for most adults, you'd be well advised to remember where your newborn baby has been sleeping for the past nine months: in his mother's womb. In the womb, of course, your newborn slept in many situations that were far from quiet - when the mother was out in public, or socializing with other people. For this reason a newborn baby will often sleep better by being exposed to some quiet background noise.

You should be trying to allow some ambient "white noise" to be around your baby when he goes to sleep. Sudden loud noises will, of course, rouse him, but in most cases some background chatter and other soothing noises will help the sleep process: most adults, I'm sure, can likely remember falling asleep to the sounds of their parents and their friends having a conversation.

There are products marketed to new parents to create these ambient noises - most notably audio CDs containing tracks of soothing noise. It usually isn't necessary to buy these, however - in most cases simply leaving the door to the baby's nursery ajar will do the trick. In a similar vein, if your baby falls asleep around company, allow him to stay there rather than moving him to a quiet room.

By helping to create the best possible environment for your baby's sleep, you help him learn to fall asleep in his own. Often a humming noise can help - we all know how easy it can be to fall asleep in a moving car - so having a humidifier or fan in the baby's room can often do wonders.

Whatever solution you choose, remember that it needn't be overly complicated. Simply leave the door ajar, or let your baby sleep in the company of others. Contrary to what many people intuitively think, if you keep your baby from sleeping in total silence, he'll often sleep much better.

Developing Sleep Associations

The process by which your child begins to fall asleep on his own is one that involves a natural transition from falling asleep with the mother to falling asleep in an independent fashion. One of the best ways in which you can speed up this transition is to encourage your child to develop sleep associations that he or she can recreate independently.

Naturally, everyone - and babies in particular - will develop sleep associations. These are the things that you associate with bedtime, and allow you to create an environment in which it is easy to fall asleep. When your baby is at an extremely young age, he will naturally develop sleep associations involving the mother, as he will often fall asleep in her arms. As you attempt to get your baby to sleep in his own, however, it is crucial that you work to change these associations.

If you always put your child to sleep by holding him, or allowing him to use a pacifier, you create a sleep association with these things. Then, when your child wakes up in the middle of the night, he can't go back to sleep on his own because he is unable to recreate his sleeping environment without you: he needs you to feed him or rock him in order to sleep.

As you begin to try and get your child to sleep on his own, you should introduce items into his sleeping routine that he can sleep with, such as a particular blanket or a stuffed animal. What this will do is create associations for your child with these items for sleep. Then, when he awakes in the middle of the night, he will be able to recreate a sleeping environment without your assistance by grabbing his stuffed animal, etc. It can also be beneficial to introduce "transitional items" into your baby's bedtime routine: Allow him to have his stuffed animal or blanket with him during a final feeding and before-bedtime activities, and allow him to take these things with him to bed.

No matter what you do, your child is going to be creating his or her own sleep associations. Your job is to try and create associations with items that are under his or her control. By giving your child as much control over his sleeping environment as possible, you allow him to begin to achieve sleep independently. The most difficult transition in early parenting is the one towards independent sleep for your child, and if you introduce new items into your child's sleeping place, you will hasten this transition, which will soon allow both you and your child to get a good night's rest.

The Ferber Method

The conventional baby sleep advice involves setting up a strict nighttime routine and introducing objects - such as stuffed animals - into the bed that your baby can associate with sleep. However, if you find after some months that your baby is still not able to sleep on his own, you can try what is known as the Ferber method.

Invented by Dr. Richard Ferber, the Ferber method is the most common way of weaning your child away from the mother, in terms of his sleep habits. It is usually successful within a couple of weeks. Nevertheless, it is important that you choose a week where you can afford to lose some sleep to begin the Ferber method. Especially at the beginning of the process, the Ferber method does require that you spend a lot of time listening to your baby crying and, if you attempt it at a time when you are desperate to sleep, you run the risk of breaking down and allowing your child to sleep with you, or sleeping in the room with him. If you do so you risk undoing a lot of work that you will have put into the method.

The first night you attempt the Ferber method, put your child to bed as you normally do. Your baby should be tired but still awake when you put him to bed, so that he is left to fall asleep on his own. After you leave the room, the baby will inevitably start crying. Allow him to cry for about 5 minutes, then re-enter the room to console him. It's important that you stay in the room for only a short time - even if he is still crying - and that you don't pick him up or rock him. This second time you leave the room, wait 10 minutes before returning in the same manner. The third time wait 15 minutes, and set this as a maximum wait time for the rest of the night.

Every time thereafter, enter the room briefly and then allow your child to cry for 15 minutes. Eventually, he will fall asleep on his own during one of the 15 minute intervals in which you are out of the room. The second night, you should begin with a 10 minute wait before re-entering the room, followed by 15 and then 20 minutes. In a similar fashion, increase your initial and subsequent wait times by 5 minutes each night.

Using this method your child will soon learn to go to sleep on his own. Although it can be difficult to listen to your baby cry, understand that the Ferber method is a safe and effective way of getting your baby to learn to sleep on his own.

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