



help baby sleep

baby & toddler sleep coach

What to Expect in Your Baby's First Year

Many new parents feel overwhelmed by expectations around baby sleep, especially during that crucial first year. We're often told that babies should sleep independently, settle themselves, and follow a predictable schedule early on. But what happens when reality doesn't match those expectations?

Parents can feel disappointed, frustrated, or even like they're failing. This couldn't be further from the truth. Sleep is a journey and understanding what's biologically normal can help you feel more confident and less stressed. Let's explore what you can expect from your baby's sleep in the first year, so you can approach these stages with knowledge and compassion.

The First Month

In the early weeks, your baby will rely on you for nearly everything, including sleep. It's normal for them to need lots of support—whether that's nursing, rocking, babywearing, or safe co-sleeping. They've spent nine months in the womb, so being close to you is their greatest comfort.

Your newborn might feed frequently around the clock and prefer sleeping in your arms or on your chest. Their days and nights may be mixed up as they're not yet producing melatonin. You might also notice their startle reflex waking them from sleep—this reflex is a sign of healthy development.

Caring for a newborn can feel overwhelming and exhausting. If you're struggling, reach out for help—whether it's someone to tidy up, prepare meals, or hold the baby while you rest. Prioritise your recovery by staying hydrated, eating nourishing foods, and seeking emotional support if you're feeling anxious or low. If breastfeeding is challenging, an IBCLC – an international board certified lactation consultant can make a huge difference.

Months 2–4

Your baby's sleep patterns might stay much the same, but you could see some small changes. Some babies start sleeping slightly longer stretches at night, but others remain frequent wakers. You might notice they become more easily disturbed by noise or light as their ability to filter out stimuli lessens.

Many babies have fussy periods, often in the late afternoon or evening. This can feel tough, but it's usually part of their adjustment to the world. Short naps are also common at this stage—these are developmentally normal and not a cause for concern.

Feeding on demand is still key, especially during growth spurts, which often happen around three months. If you're breastfeeding, nighttime feeds can help maintain your supply, so don't feel pressured to reduce them prematurely.

Months 4–6

This period is famous for the “four-month sleep regression,” but we prefer to call it a *sleep progression*. It's a sign that your baby is growing and developing new skills! During this time, sleep can become more fragmented, with frequent night wakings and shorter naps.

Developmental milestones, like rolling over or babbling, can also impact sleep. These progressions may feel exhausting, but they're temporary. Support your baby with responsive care, feed on demand, and lean on your support network to get through it.

For more information on how development can impact sleep have a read of this blog:

[Understanding Sleep Changes in Babies: Debunking the Myth of Sleep Regressions – Help Baby Sleep – Baby and Toddler Sleep Coach London.](#)

Months 6–8

Sleep can still feel unpredictable during this stage, especially as milestones like crawling and sitting up emerge. Separation anxiety might appear, making bedtime a little trickier. Keep offering consistent comfort, as your baby looks to you for reassurance.

Many babies begin to transition to longer naps around this age, but short naps are still within the realm of normal. Distraction during daytime feeds might lead to more nighttime nursing, so try to create a calm, quiet feeding environment.

Months 8–12

As your baby becomes more mobile, sleep disruptions often follow. Crawling, standing, and even early walking can result in wakeful nights. You might notice your baby resisting their afternoon nap—this could signal a shift to two naps instead of three.

Feeding on demand remains important. Night feeds are still normal and developmentally appropriate. Remember, every baby is different, and their needs may vary greatly.

Key Considerations for Your Baby's First Year

Night waking is normal

It's important to remember that waking during the night is a natural part of your baby's development. Most babies will wake several times, whether for a feed, comfort, or simply due to light sleep cycles. However, if your baby is consistently waking every 45 minutes to 2 hours without any longer stretches of sleep, it might indicate an underlying sleep red flag that's worth exploring. Common sleep red flags can include feeding challenges, reflux, oral ties, or even breathing difficulties like mouth breathing. These issues can often be addressed with the help of health professionals, such as lactation consultants, paediatricians, or feeding specialists. If you're unsure, seeking support is never a sign of failure—it's a step toward understanding and helping your baby thrive.

Responsive sleep tools are valuable

You might have heard concerns about “sleep crutches” or “bad habits” when it comes to how your baby gets to sleep. It's time to reframe that thinking. Sleep associations, such as nursing, rocking, patting, or using white noise, are powerful tools for helping your baby feel safe and comforted. These aren't “problems” unless they're causing stress for you or your family. Nursing to sleep, for example, is biologically normal and a natural way to soothe your baby. Over time, as your child grows and develops, they'll naturally move away from needing this support. Trust that these practices are laying the foundation for your baby to learn self-regulation in the future.

Flexibility over schedules

While it can be tempting to follow a rigid schedule for naps and feeds, most babies under six months aren't developmentally ready for this kind of structure. Instead of focusing on strict timings, try observing your baby's cues for hunger or tiredness and responding accordingly. Flexibility allows you to meet your baby's unique needs while reducing stress for everyone. As your baby grows, gentle routines can become a helpful way to signal when it's time to wind down for naps or bedtime, but there's no rush. Let your baby guide you and do what feels right for your family's rhythm.

Safe co-sleeping can be an option

Co-sleeping is a choice many families find works well for them, providing closeness and convenience for nighttime feeds. If you choose to bed-share, it's important to do so safely. Follow guidelines from

experts like [Professor James McKenna](#), which include ensuring a firm mattress, keeping bedding minimal, and avoiding co-sleeping if you or your partner smoke, have consumed alcohol, or are overly tired. Some families find a combination approach works best, such as starting the night in a crib or bassinet and bringing the baby into bed after a nighttime waking. There's no one-size-fits-all solution, so experiment with what feels safest and most comfortable for you.

Parent for today, not tomorrow

One of the most liberating mindsets is to focus on parenting the baby you have now, rather than worrying about future habits. It's common to feel pressure to wean night feeds, stop rocking, or transition your baby to their own room because of what "might" happen later. However, babies develop at their own pace, and supporting their current needs won't create dependency forever. On the contrary, meeting your baby's needs for comfort and connection now builds a foundation of trust and confidence that will foster independence when they're ready. Remember, you're not spoiling your baby; you're nurturing them during a time when they depend on you the most.

Need More Support?

If you're finding sleep particularly challenging, our comprehensive sleep support packages can guide you through this journey with compassion and expertise. Together, we'll find a solution that works for your baby and your family.

[Baby Sleep Help - My Services - Help Baby Sleep: Baby and Toddler Sleep Coach London](#)