

4 Tips to Help Your Child Sleep Better

When we work with families, it's important to look at baby's sleep environment and the activity leading up to sleep. Although they may seem obvious, the following tips can be overlooked and underestimated in their ability to improve your little ones sleep.

1. Maintain a dark sleep environment

Light, natural or artificial, sends a message to our brains that it's daytime, and not time to sleep. Melatonin, which is the hormone that regulates our wake and sleep cycles, is triggered by darkness, so start turning down the lights an hour before you plan to put baby down. (Especially electronic screens, which emit a blue light that is particularly inimical to baby's shut-down process.)

For babies who wake up early, invest in some blackout blinds. Other alternatives include travel blackout blinds that attach to the window or even some black bin bags securely taped to the windows will also work as a temporary solution. Remember to position baby's cot against a non-window wall for safety reasons if you are using the stick-on options.

Exposure to sunlight during the day will aid in the production of melatonin at night so to try to get outside around midday for a walk with your child. Some foods are also associated with producing melatonin, such as bananas, oatmeal and cherries.

Breast milk produced at night is higher in melatonin. Note the time the milk was expressed and offer nighttime milk at night to help regulate baby's sleep.

2. Ensure an appropriate temperature

It can be tricky to know what to dress children in for bed, especially as temperatures drop during the night. Have some kind of thermostat in your child's room, there are plenty on the market.

Babies, like us, sleep best when they're warm and snugly inside of a cool environment. Appropriate nightwear and a cool nursery, somewhere around 65°F and 70°F (18°C – 21°C) is the best way to ensure that baby remains comfortable through the night.

Swipe left to see the guidelines for dressing your baby appropriately.

3. Less is more when it comes to your child's sleep environment

I know we all love the look of a cute mobile over the top of our baby's cot, or those crib projector mobiles with that play sounds, but even though they may seem soothing to us, they can be a real source of fascination for your little one, which is great! Just not when they're trying to sleep. To a baby, they can be the equivalent of an action movie, so keep visual stimulation away from the cot and put your baby to sleep in a cool, quiet and dark room.

Playing soothing lullabies or reading stories as part of the sleep routine is an ideal way to wind down before it's time to sleep for any age. Keep the lighting relaxed and avoid over stimulating. For toddlers and older, create a special area in your child's room for these activities can take place where you can sit together for a short time before it's time for bed.

A white noise machine can help to block out any outside noise that might jar baby into waking up, and a yellow night light can be a solution for toddlers that are afraid of the dark, but other than that, the more boring your child's bedroom is, the better they'll sleep.

4. Be predictable

A well-planned, consistent bedtime routine is conducive to a good night's sleep, no matter what your age, but particularly with babies. Once their bodies and brains start to recognize the signals that indicate an upcoming bedtime, they will start preparing to pack it in for the evening as soon as that first step begins. Their energy levels will start to wind down, melatonin production will kick in, and muscles will start to relax, so by the time you're saying goodnight, their system should be all set for a long, restorative sleep.

Reading stories as part of the sleep routine is an ideal way to wind down before it's time to sleep. Keep the lighting relaxed and avoid over stimulating. Create a special area in your child's room where story time can take place. For example, a bean bag in the corner or some cushions on the floor where you can sit together for a short time before it's time for bed.

A bath is also nice to include as it's different from anything else they have done throughout the day and can be a clear signal that bedtime is nearing.

