



# How to get more deep sleep as new parents

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**BABY DEVELOPMENT ARTICLES**

**ARTICLE**

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Sleep deprivation and fatigue are common amongst new mums or mummies with little ones. By being familiar with their children's sleep cycle, mums will be able to rest and sleep better.

*Sleep loss is the number 1 complaint of new mums or mummies with little ones.*

**A baby can be hard work and may take a toll on your health. Here are some tips to manage sleep loss and fatigue with your child.**

Sleep may seem like a distant dream to you now that you have a little baby. Gone are the days where you could get 8 hours of uninterrupted sleep. The fact that your little one is now with you (after waiting to hold her and be with her for 9 long months!) may excite you, but the resulting sleep deprivation may take its toll on you.

Sleep loss IS the number 1 complaint of new mums or mummies with little ones, so don't fret, you're not the only one going through this! Here are some tips to help you maximise your sleeping time during this highly demanding phase of your life.

# Understanding your own sleep cycle

The first thing to understand is how your own sleep cycle works. An adult's sleep cycle is typically broken up into 2 main segments - rapid eye movement (REM) cycle and non-REM cycle.

Non-REM sleep consists of 4 stages - stage 1 is the drowsy state; in stage 2, body and eye movements stop and your brain waves slow down. Stages 3 and 4 are deep sleep in which your breathing regulates and this is the most restorative stages of sleep. Moving through these 4 stages will take about 90 minutes, after which the body will enter the REM cycle - where most dreams occur.

The entire cycle of 4 stages and a period of REM sleep are completed about 4 to 6 times a night. The deep restorative sleep will take place during the first third of the night<sup>1</sup>.

# Understanding your baby's sleep cycle

The first thing to take note of is that your baby's sleep patterns are nothing like yours. A baby's sleep includes a higher percentage of REM. At 3 months of age, your child spends 50 to 80 percent of sleep time in REM, compared with your 20 percent. The baby's sleep cycles run for approximately 50 minutes compared to your 90 minutes.

What this means is that your child will wake up easily, sleep for shorter periods (for no more than 3 to 4 hours), and maintain this light, disordered "pattern" around the clock - yes, all day long.

When your baby is awake, so are you. This leads to sleep deprivation, typical of parents of little ones<sup>2</sup>. Each time you get up and go back to bed, you have to start the sleep cycle all over again, entering the light stages before you return to deep sleep. The result is exhaustion.

# Tips to help with sleep loss and fatigue:

The good news is that since many parents have already experienced this, there are plenty of tips you can follow!

1. Sleep when the baby sleeps - even if this means sleeping multiple times a day rather than only once throughout the night.
2. Don't 'bed share' with the baby during sleep. Put your baby in their crib when it is time for you to take a nap, so you can get better sleep.
3. Split up parenting duties - there is no shame in asking your co-parent to chip in

more so you can catch more sleep.

4. Don't eat heavily or drink caffeinated beverages before bedtime<sup>3</sup>. Try drinking a warm glass of milk instead, like Wyeth S-26 Mama Maternal and Lactating milk, which will also help manage your health and nutrition.
5. It's also helpful if someone can look after your child for a couple of hours during the day to give you some rest and space<sup>4</sup>.
6. If your baby cries in the middle of the night, give watchful waiting a try. Watchful waiting is letting your baby fuss and cry a little in the middle of the night. Sometimes, it is just a sign that they are settling down. Only get up if the crying persists and you suspect your baby is hungry or uncomfortable.
7. It is also easier to fight fatigue if you establish a routine for your day. This helps you and your baby feel secure and relaxed.
8. Set a schedule for sleeping, changing, feeding, and the necessary household chores. When there's a chance for you to take a nap, you can do it without worrying about anything else. Avoid the temptation to do housework when they're asleep; it's more important for you to get some rest.

## Something important to note:

Sleeplessness, when accompanied by other symptoms, can be a sign of depression. It is best to speak to a professional if you believe this is something to be concerned about.

## References:

1. Wolfson, A. R. (2001). *The Woman's Book of Sleep*. New Harbinger Publications.
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3. Infant and Toddler Health. Available at <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/infant-and-toddler-health/in-depth/healthy-baby/art-20046556>. Accessed on August 20 2017





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