

## sweet dreams

SLEEP QUICKLY BECOMES AN IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR NEW PARENTS. HERE INTERNATIONAL BOARD-CERTIFIED LACTATION CONSULTANT, INFANT MASSAGE INSTRUCTOR AND AUTHOR PINKY MCKAY SHARES SOME OF HER TIPS

**J**ust like us, babies are individuals – and this goes for sleep requirements too. It may help (or not, if you are suffering from sleep deprivation) to realise that in most infant sleep studies, “all night” is defined as five hours. If you are thinking that even five hours uninterrupted sleep would be a dream come true, here are some gentle strategies you can try that could help your baby, and you, to sleep better.

**1 KNOW THE SIGNS** None of us like being kept awake when we are craving sleep, so rather than waiting until your baby is “past it”, put him to bed as soon as he shows sleepy signs such as becoming quiet, yawning, making jerky movements, losing interest in people and toys, and fussing. If you miss this window of opportunity, your baby is likely to find it hard to settle.

**2 BEDTIME RITUALS** Introducing a routine at bedtime can provide cues that help even tiny babies wind down and become conditioned to fall asleep. From the earliest days, give your baby a deep, warm relaxation bath in an adult bathtub just before bedtime.

**3 MAGIC TOUCH** Silent nights could be at your fingertips. Research performed at Miami University showed that infants and toddlers who were massaged daily for one month for 15 minutes prior to bedtime fell asleep more easily by the end of the study.

**4 SOOTHING SOUNDS** The calming, repetitive sounds of traditional lullabies recall the “womb music” your baby heard before birth. Baby music that incorporates elements such as the rhythm of the maternal heartbeat or “white noise” has remarkable soothing effects, especially if played continuously through the night.

**5 ROCK-A-BYE BABY** The motion of a rocking chair or being carried in a sling will lull baby to sleep. So will a special-purpose baby hammock – as he moves and arouses during the night, he will start the hammock rocking.

**6 ALL SNUGGLED UP** The startle reflex, a primitive survival reflex that produces jerky, spontaneous movements, even in sleep, can be disturbing (literally). Provide a sense of security by swaddling your newborn in a gauze or muslin sheet in summer or a soft shawl in winter. Gradually wrap more loosely and discard the wrap as this reflex disappears, by around three months.

**7 CUT THE CAFFEINE** Caffeine can create a vicious cycle if you are breastfeeding. You drink coffee (or tea or cola) to give you a hit, then baby gets a boost of stimulant through your milk and becomes restless. Newborns are particularly vulnerable, taking up to 97 hours to get rid of it.

**8 DAYTIME FEEDS** Little tummies require frequent refills, but soon your baby will start sleeping at least one longer stretch between feeds. If he sleeps for more than four hours between feeds during the day, it is reasonable to gently unwrap him and offer a feed. If he accepts this he may save his longer sleep for night time. If he is not ready to alter his pattern, be patient.

**9 TOP-UP FEED** Whatever time your baby was last fed, gently offer a feed just before you go to bed (he will suck in his sleep). With luck, his longer sleep may coincide with yours.

**10 TIME FOR SLEEP** Teach the difference between night and day by keeping the lights low and attending to him quietly during night feeds. Save play and chatter for daytime.

**11 DO NOT DISTURB** Avoid waking baby during night-feed times by changing the nappy either before or half way through a feed, not when baby is all “groggy” and full. If he is falling asleep during feeds and only having a short feed, try changing his nappy half way through, then offering him the other breast.

**12 BREAST COMFORT** Falling asleep on the breast is one of the easiest ways for most babies to settle. This is due to hormones released while your baby feeds, but if you are concerned about it becoming a habit, alternate feeding with other sleep cues and take heart: he may still like to snuggle up to a breast when he’s 21 – but it won’t be yours!

**13 SLEEP CYCLES** Research shows that mums and babies who sleep within reach of each other (not necessarily in the same bed) share the same sleep cycles, so these mothers get more sleep overall. Keep in mind the SIDS risk reduction guidelines – for more information visit [www.sidsandkids.org](http://www.sidsandkids.org) or phone 1300 308 307.

**14 A BIT OF MUMMY** It’s not exactly a substitute, but if you slip your own soft, unwashed T-shirt over baby’s mattress, he will be comforted by your familiar smell as he sleeps.

**15 STOP THE CLOCK** Simply knowing how long you are awake can be enough to make you too tense to get back to sleep, or it may encourage you to rush your baby, making him feel anxious. If you see your baby’s waking as a genuine need, it could help you to enjoy this precious cuddle time: feel the softness of his skin, breathe in his delicious smell and snuggle! •  
Pinky McKay is the author of *Sleeping Like a Baby* (Penguin, \$24.95). Visit [www.pinky-mychild.com](http://www.pinky-mychild.com).

