

Your sleep struggles SORTED!

Everything's rosy after a good night's kip, and everything's rubbish when you and your baby are shattered. Sleep experts solve your most common baby snooze issues



Counting zzz's

Q How long should my 4-month-old sleep during the night, and in total over a 24-hour period? *Orla Roche, via Facebook*

A Vicki Dawson, sleep practitioner and founder of The Children's Sleep Charity (thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk), says: "Generally speaking, a 4-month-old should be sleeping around 10 hours at night and around 4-5 hours in the daytime; in total spending about 14-15 hours asleep over a 24-hour period."

Night waker

Q How do I get my 9-month-old baby to sleep through the night without letting her cry it out? She's still taking a night feed.

Kaela Butler-Flanagan, via Facebook

A Sarah Ockwell-Smith, director of BabyCalm (babycalm.co.uk) says: "Night waking at this age is normal, it's the stage when separation anxiety can develop as your baby realises that you are separate beings and you could leave her – understandably making her anxious. This means you've done a great job as a mum so far as your baby is secure in her relationship with you. So it will pass, but it may last a few months yet. I'd suggest that you work on helping your daughter to feel secure so that when she wakes at night she doesn't need to call out for you."

You could try bringing her into your bed until the separation anxiety passes, or if you'd rather she stays in her own cot, then try using a comforter. Make sure it smells of you and help her associate good feelings with it by giving it to her to hold every time you feed and cuddle her."

Controlled crying

Q My friend swears by controlled crying, while another has said it's been proven to be psychological damaging. Who's right?

Catherine Anderson, 29, from Sussex, mum to Joseph, 7 months

A Hannah Love, baby and child sleep expert and founder of Yummy Baby Group (yummybabygroup.co.uk), says: "As a sleep expert who never recommends controlled crying, I get frustrated that parents are often told this is the only option. If followed through, it can result in a baby settling independently, but it can fail, too – leaving parents in a far worse position than when they started."

Research shows that controlled crying raises babies' stress hormones and we don't fully know any long-term implications of this. There are other kinder ways of teaching your baby to self soothe, such as gradual withdrawal, pick up, put down or shush pat. These must be followed through consistently and it's best not to do the 'try everything' approach. Find one you're comfortable with, research it, follow it through and it'll work. All sleep solutions involve some crying, which is tough to handle so ensure you have someone to support you."



Compiled by Lara Brunt. "The Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths (FSID) recommends that your baby sleeps in a cot or crib in a room with you for the first six months. You should not sleep with your baby in your bed if you (or your partner) are a smoker, have been drinking alcohol, take medication or drugs that make you drowsy, feel very tired, or if your baby was premature (before 37 weeks) or low birth weight (less than 2.5kg or 5.5lb)." www.nhs.uk



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Dummy drama

Q I have to keep replacing my 5-month old's dummy when it falls out until he falls asleep. How do I wean him off it?

Jodie Ringwood, 26, from Essex, mum to Holly, 4, Rhys, 2, and Riley, 5 mths

A Hannah says: "A dummy can be a great tool for parents, but can also start causing more issues than it solves, at which point you'll need to remove it. As long as you're consistent, this doesn't have to be too tough, especially with babies under 6 months. Start by only using the dummy at sleep times and remove it from all awake times for a few days. Build up to removing it completely, and then avoid temptation by throwing all dummies away. After a couple of unsettled nights (when your baby will naturally need a little more comfort), he will be dummy free."



Consistency
is paramount to
success



Out and about

Q My son sleeps beautifully at home but fights it when we're out. How can I get him to nap in a pushchair?

Becky Gower, 24, from Kent, mum to Dylan, 10 months

A Sarah says: "Think about the environment your son has his naps in. Can you replicate this when you're out? For instance, if he naps in a nursery with a blackout blind you could use a pushchair shade like SnoozeShade (£19.99, snoozeshade.com), and you could use a comforter associated with sleep time, like a blanket. Also try a pushchair that fully reclines so he can lay flat as he does in his cot and preferably faces you, away from all of the stimulation of the world. Lastly, carrying your baby in a sling or carrier can work wonders."

Car lover

Q My 4-month-old will only sleep when she's in the pushchair or car. I often find myself driving around at night to get her to drop off. Help!

Nicky Smith, 39, from Cheshire, mum to Maxine, 4 months

A Hannah says: "Having a baby who's unable to self-soothe is the number one reason I'm contacted for advice. The good news is your baby does sleep; we just need to change the situations that she's comfortable sleeping in – from the pushchair or car to her bed. In order to do this you need consistency, so set a plan and stick to it.

I always start by setting a good routine with sleep triggers (such as music). This will tell your baby when it's time to sleep. Once this is in place, slowly change where and how she's sleeping by a form of gradual withdrawal. A starting point could still be in the pushchair but make sure this is in the house, and finally the big step of getting her into her cot. Throughout this process it's vital that you have lots of support so ensure that your partner, a parent or a friend is on board. This ensures consistency, too, which is paramount to the success of any sleep programme."