



Promoting a Healthy Sleep Routine

Regular predictable bedtime routines help babies and young children to settle happily to sleep. These bedtime routines are especially important if your baby or child is a late settler or resists going to bed.

Bedtime routines provide comfort, security and continuity, helping babies and children to feel safe and contained.

- Familiar bedtime routines help to regulate your baby's body clock, which controls 'circadian rhythms'. These rhythms determine our sleep patterns and respond to light and darkness in the environment, which is why it's important to keep lights low at bedtime. Research shows that regular bedtime routines help babies and children to fall asleep more quickly and easily, resulting in less night waking and making for happier, calmer and healthier parents.
- A calming bedtime routine should ideally start 30 minutes before your baby or child normally falls asleep.
- The last part of the bedtime routine should take place in your child's cot or bed. This is important as your little one should associate getting ready for bed with going to bed and falling asleep. Stay firm over bedtimes and don't extend the routine or give in to pleading (e.g.: "Just 5 more minutes!").

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For additional fact sheets see www.ihv.org.uk

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- Kiss your child goodnight and leave them to go to sleep on their own. 'Self-settling' is an important skill you can help your child learn so they do not become dependent on you being in the room to go to sleep.
- Avoid activities or games that make your baby or child excited before bed. Bedtimes should be calming, relaxing and enjoyable for you both. Bedtime is a wonderful opportunity to spend some quality one-to-one time together.
- The bathroom makes a good transition zone for preparing your child for bed. It's much easier to encourage your child to go to bed from the bathroom as this room is less stimulating and exciting than the main living room, for example, where the TV might be on or your partner or a sibling might be around.
- Ensure you follow the same routine - in the same order - each night. This might include having a bath, followed by teeth brushing. Once their teeth have been brushed only allow your child to have a glass of water to drink. Then put night clothes on and jump into bed for a story, a cuddle and a kiss, before leaving your child to settle themselves to sleep.
- 'White noise' has been proven to aid sleep. White noise is a combination of all of the different frequencies of sound and it can be used to block out other noises that may disturb sleep. Soft sounds like ocean waves breaking on a beach, an adult's heartbeat, a waterfall, a stream or the sound of rain work well.
- Late nights and irregular bedtime routines affect your child's ability to learn. Sufficient sleep is important for development and lack of sleep affects your child's concentration, verbal creativity, abstract thinking and ability to learn. In 2013 a major UK study of over 11,000 children with irregular bedtimes showed they performed less well than their classmates in terms of test scores for reading, maths and spatial awareness.
- If you can remain calm and relaxed at bedtime this will help your child to settle more easily. Babies and children are quick to pick up how we feel; they are like sponges

absorbing what is going on around them. If there is a lot of tension or upset at home this can affect their ability to sleep. Take deep breaths and ensure you yourself get enough sleep. If you are feeling stressed or upset ensure you get help with this. You can contact your Health Visitor for support if anxiety is getting you down and having an effect on your child's sleep routine.

- Do bear in mind that not all babies sleep through at 6 months and if your baby hasn't got into a routine by this time it's not because you've done something wrong. If you're really struggling with broken nights don't suffer alone – your Health Visitor can suggest strategies you can try to help your baby sleep better at night.

More information:

Visit the NHS Choices website for useful advice on getting your baby to sleep:

bit.ly/URCbwi

The website also has helpful information on common sleep problems in young children:

bit.ly/1srzCQc