

Insomnia When You Have a Newborn



Insomnia is when you have a hard time falling or staying asleep, or you wake up too early. It can happen for short periods of time and then go away. Or it can last for weeks or months (chronic). Parents with newborns may have insomnia. You may be feeding your baby every few hours during the night and day. You may not be able to fall asleep when your baby is napping. Postpartum mood changes can also affect sleep. You may feel depressed or anxious. Lack of sleep can hurt your immune system, lead to depression, and make it hard to lose weight. It can make it hard for you to do daily tasks, care for your baby, and take care of yourself. But there are ways you can manage your insomnia.

Working with your baby's sleep pattern

Experts advise sleeping when your baby sleeps. But it can be hard to adapt to the same sleep-wake schedule that your baby follows. Newborn babies usually sleep a total of about 8 to 9 hours in the daytime and a total of about 8 hours at night. But they must wake every few hours to eat. Most babies don't start sleeping through the night (6 to 8 hours) until at least 3 months of age. But this can vary a lot. Some babies don't sleep through the night until closer to 1 year. In most cases, your baby will wake up and be ready to eat at least every 3 hours.

It can help if you:

- Try to adjust your baby's sleep to fit a day-night cycle. At night, have lights dim and the setting quiet. During the day, keep your baby active longer. Then they will sleep better at night.
- Take a daily walk with your baby. Fresh air and daylight will help you both sleep better.
- When your baby sleeps, lie down for a nap or put your feet up and rest. Even a light sleep can help refresh you. During stage 1 sleep, you may hear sounds around you, but your brain and body do get rest.
- Give your baby breastmilk at night instead of formula. This can help your baby sleep better, and help you sleep better. Breastmilk has natural melatonin in it. This is a hormone that helps sleep.

Self-care for better sleep

Some healthy lifestyle changes can improve your sleep. It will help you to:

- Get some exercise every day. It may help you reduce stress. Don't do strenuous exercise for 2 to 4 hours before bedtime.
- Don't drink alcohol for at least 4 to 6 hours before bedtime. It may help you fall asleep at first. But you will have more awakenings during the night. And your sleep will not be restful. If you are breastfeeding, talk to your healthcare provider before drinking alcohol.
- Limit coffee, black tea, and cola. These have caffeine and may keep you awake at night.
- Don't use nicotine for up to 6 hours before bedtime. It can keep you awake at night. If you are breastfeeding, talk to your healthcare provider before using nicotine from any source.

Getting ready for bedtime

To sleep better, try these tips:

- Use a comfortable mattress and pillow.
- Don't eat a large meal just before sleep.

- Remove noises, bright lights, TVs, cell phones, and computers from your sleeping environment.
- Make sure the room is not too hot or too cold. If it's not dark enough, an eye mask can help.
- Have a bedtime routine to let your body and mind know when it's time to sleep.
- Think of going to bed as relaxing and enjoyable. Sleep will come sooner.
- If your worries don't let you sleep, write them down in a diary. Then close it, and go to bed.
- Don't spend too much time in bed trying to fall asleep. If you can't fall asleep, get up and do something (no electronics) until you become tired and drowsy.

To help you relax

Stress, anxiety, and body tension may keep you awake. To unwind before bedtime, try a warm bath, meditation, or yoga. Also try:

- Deep breathing. Sit or lie back in a chair. Take a slow, deep breath. Hold it for 5 counts. Then breathe out slowly through your mouth. Keep doing this until you feel relaxed.
- Progressive muscle relaxation. Tense and then relax the muscles in your body as you breathe deeply. Start with your feet and work up your body to your neck and face.

Getting support from others

Partners and other caregivers can help lighten your load to help you get sleep. Accept help when it's offered. Ask for help when you need it. Express your breastmilk with a breast pump. Let someone else feed your baby while you nap. Many new mothers feel a little down for a few weeks. Share your feelings with your loved ones.

If you don't feel comfortable sharing your feelings with loved ones, contact your healthcare provider. The Office of Women's Health, a federal government agency has a helpline for women worried about postpartum depression or other mental health concerns. You can reach them at 800-994-9662.

Sleep medicines and breastfeeding

If you're breastfeeding, talk to your healthcare provider before taking any kind of medicine, supplement, or herb to help with sleep. Some of these may go into your breastmilk. Even melatonin tablets may affect your baby through your breastmilk.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider if you have any of the following:

- Symptoms that don't get better, or get worse
- New symptoms

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