

# Sleep Well, Sleep Safe

A booklet for parents of infants from  
0-12 months and for *all* who care for infants



**best start**  
**meilleur départ**  
Resource Centre/Centre de ressources

by/par health **nexus** santé



**This booklet is divided in three sections:**



### **HEALTHY SLEEP TIPS FOR INFANTS AND FOR PARENTS**

Be informed about recommendations on healthy sleep practices for parents and infants.



### **SAFE SLEEP TIPS FOR INFANTS 0-12 MONTHS**

Be informed on how to reduce the risks of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and other sleep related causes of infant death.



### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS) & ANSWERS**

The FAQs & answers along with the recommended resources can provide you with further information on healthy and safe sleep for infants.



# Healthy Sleep Tips for Infants

## Here are a few recommendations to help your infant sleep well:

- Respond to your infant's cues day and night. Learn the cues that mean your infant is tired, e.g., yawns, losing interest, quiet, whines more, rubs his eyes, etc.
- Aim for a flexible feeding and sleeping routine based on the needs of your infant.
- Feed your infant whenever he shows feeding cues. Most newborn babies feed at least 8 times in 24 hours. Some babies feed regularly and establish a routine quickly, others like to have short feeds very often especially in the evening or at night. Cluster feeding (frequent short feeds) is very common in the first few weeks.
- Keep rooms bright and well lit with natural sunlight during the daytime.
  - Increase interactions between you and your infant during the daytime when they are most wake and alert. Familiarize him to common sounds and noises.
  - Establish a brief routine before bedtime and nap time. Your infant will learn to associate the bedtime and nap routine with going to sleep. Choose a couple of activities like breastfeeding, bathing, telling a story, singing or massaging, etc. The routine should be enjoyable to all.
  - Keep your infant's sleeping area comfortable with dim light and appropriate temperature.
  - Keep night time quiet. Speak softly and repeat comforting words or sounds.
  - Place your infant in his crib, cradle or bassinet to sleep. Over time your infant learns that this is the place where he sleeps.





- Put your infant to bed when he is drowsy but not yet asleep. This will help your infant to learn to settle and fall asleep by himself.
- Comfort your crying infant. It will not spoil him! Responding affectionately will help him learn that you will be there when needed. It helps your infant feel more secure and comfortable.
- If your infant is crying or fussing you can speak, sing or stroke his forehead. Your presence may be sufficient to help your infant fall asleep. This will help your infant to learn how to self-soothe and fall back to sleep on his own.
- White noise (continuous and monotonous sounds) such as the sound of a fan, vacuum cleaner, humidifier or recording of ocean waves may help your infant sleep. However, if used all the time your infant may come to depend on white noise to help him fall asleep.
- Have realistic expectations. Not all infants are alike.



### Guide to Infant Sleep Patterns

All babies are different and their patterns vary as they grow. The following information serves only as a guide.

AGE	SLEEP AMOUNT
0-3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14 to 17 hours of sleep per 24 hours</li> <li>• Many brief periods of sleep, ranging from 30 minutes to 3-4 hours at a time</li> <li>• Awake for 2 hours or less at a time</li> <li>• May cry a lot or have a fussy period of 3 to 6 hours, usually in the evening or at night</li> <li>• May sleep more during the day than during the night</li> </ul>
4-6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12-16 hours of sleep per 24 hours</li> <li>• 2-3 naps, ranging from 30 minutes to 3 hours at a time</li> <li>• After 3 months naps become more regular</li> <li>• May still have a fussy period, usually in the evening</li> <li>• May have longer sleep periods at night</li> </ul>
6-11 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12-16 hours of sleep per 24 hours</li> <li>• 2 naps, ranging from 30 minutes to 2 hours</li> </ul>
12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11-14 hours of sleep per 24 hours</li> <li>• 1-2 naps, ranging from 30 minutes to 2 hours</li> </ul>

## Healthy Sleep Tips for Parents

Following an infant's schedule does not allow much time for parents to sleep, especially when a newborn can feed every 2 hours and on cue (as often as they are interested). Healthy sleep habits for parents promote health and family harmony.



**Make sleep an important priority by following these tips:**

- **Establish a bedtime routine.** Having a routine before going to bed helps you sleep well. Even if you do not follow your routine every time, you are teaching your body and your mind to wind down before sleeping. Your routine can include a couple of activities like having a bath, brushing your teeth, reading, listening to soft music, closing the curtains, etc.
- **Make your sleep environment welcoming. Ideally your bedroom should be:**
  - As dark as possible even for a day time rest.
  - Free of noise.
  - Inviting and comfortable.
  - A few degrees cooler than the rest of the house.
  - Free of electronic devices like a digital clock, television, computers, phones, etc.

- **Set realistic expectations**

- Expect to sleep 2 to 4 hours at a time in the first few weeks.
- Focus on feeding and bonding with your infant.
- Accept that you will feel tired.
- Let go of expectations of having a tidy and clean house.
- Ask for help.
- If you feel depressed, tell your partner and call your health care provider.

- **Allow yourself to extend your usual night time sleep.** For example, in the evening after feeding your infant, if he falls asleep at 8pm and you feel like you could fall asleep, go to bed even though it seems early. Similarly, if after the morning feeding your infant goes back asleep and you feel like you could sleep more, go back to sleep for a while.

- **If you find it helpful, sleep or rest when your infant sleeps during the day.**



**The following tips are also important to ensure that you have time to catch up on your sleep and to relax:**



- **Work as a team, either with your partner, family and friends**
  - Divide up childcare responsibilities.
  - Divide up household responsibilities.
  - Focus on the basics (caring for your infant, sleeping, eating and caring for yourself).
- **Make time to get out of the house**
  - Take a walk or stretch outside.
  - Catch a few rays of sun, especially in the morning or early afternoon. This will help to adjust your sleep-wake patterns. If light exposure occurs too late in the afternoon, this can delay falling asleep at night.





- **Take enjoyable breaks**

- Do things you liked to do prior to having an infant, e.g., reading, walking, talking with friends, stretching, exercising, taking a nice bath, etc.
- Even a 2 minute break is beneficial.

- **Limit the number of guests until you are well rested**

- Let everyone know that you need to rest. Be creative – you can put a note on your door, leave a message on your voicemail, on your Facebook page, etc.

- **Eat healthy food**

- Choose food with no caffeine and food low in sugar. Since you may sleep anytime during the day, avoid these stimulating foods as much as possible.
- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Drink water when you are thirsty.
- Plan ahead and freeze healthy ready to cook meals.
- Ask family and friends for healthy home cooked meals instead of baby gifts or frequent visits.





- **Practice relaxation techniques**

- Try different relaxation methods to see what suits you best, for example deep breathing, visualization, yoga, etc.

- **Be physically active**

- Start slowly and gradually increase the duration and intensity of your workout.

- **Don't forget about intimacy**

- Take time to cuddle with your partner.
- Be honest.
- Talk, laugh and share stories.

- **Reach out** to friends, family, co-workers, community workers, or health care providers to provide practical assistance and emotional support.



You will need to adapt your sleep practices to fit your infant and family agenda. These tips can help you feel less stressed. They can also help to prevent postpartum depression. It is very important to talk to your health care provider if you are feeling anxious, worried more than usual, less interested in your usual activities and have been feeling down, sad, irritable or hopeless for more than two weeks.

Take care of yourself, you are not being selfish. Parents have to stay healthy to take care of their infant and themselves.





## Safe Sleep Practices for Infants 0–12 months



Creating a safe sleep environment for your infant is an important step in reducing the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and other sleep related causes of infant death.

SIDS is the sudden, unexpected and unexplained death of an infant less than one year of age. SIDS normally happens during sleep. It is the number one cause of death for healthy infants under the age of one in Canada. We don't know what causes SIDS. SIDS cannot be predicted or prevented. However, safe sleep practices can help reduce the risk of SIDS.

Providing a safe sleep environment free from hazards can also help reduce the risk of accidental deaths, such as suffocation or strangulation.

Parents and **all** who care for infants should be informed about the current recommendations for safe sleep practices to reduce the risks of SIDS and other causes of infant death.



## Recommended Safe Sleep Practices

### Creating a Safe Sleep environment

- Share the same room with your infant for at least the first 6 months of life. Place the crib, cradle or bassinet next to your bed.
- Right from birth always place your baby on her back to sleep, at naptime and night time.
- Place your infant to sleep on a separate sleep surface in an age appropriate crib, cradle or bassinet that meets current Canadian safety regulations.
- Provide a sleep surface that is firm and flat.
- Remove pillows, comforters, quilts, stuffed animals, bumper pads, positional devices or other loose or soft bedding materials that could suffocate or smother an infant.
- Dress your infant in comfortable fitted one-piece sleepwear.
- Ensure that the room temperature is comfortable for everyone.
- Baby boxes for sleeping must meet current Canadian safety regulations. Follow the instructions. Not all baby boxes are made for sleep.
- Baby seats, swings, car seats, bouncers, strollers, slings and playpens are not safe substitutes for a crib.



**Sharing a sleep surface with your infant increases the risk of SIDS and accidental death.**

**Adult beds, sofas, chairs and any soft surface where you may sleep are not designed with your baby's safety in mind.**

**The safest place for your infant to sleep is in his crib, cradle or bassinet.**





### Steps You Can Take to Reduce the Risks

- Smoking during pregnancy exposes unborn babies to tobacco smoke which is one of the greatest risks for SIDS. No smoking at all is best for your baby but decreasing the number of cigarettes you smoke can also lower the risk of SIDS.
- Second-hand smoke also increases the risk of SIDS after your baby is born. Avoid smoking near your baby – in the house, in the car or anywhere your baby sleeps or spends time. If you, your partner, family members or friends smoke, smoke outside and away from your baby.
- Alcohol use and substance use pose a risk for SIDS and other unintended injuries in infants. It is safer to ask your partner or someone you trust to care for your infant until you are completely sober and not under the influence of substances.
- Breastfeed your infant. Any amount of breastfeeding for any duration provides a protective effect against SIDS. Exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months offers greater protection.
- Immunize your infant. This gives your infant that extra immunity and protection to fight off vaccine-preventable diseases and to stay healthy.

#### The risk of infant death is higher if you share a sleep surface with your infant and if you:

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| ✓ Drink alcohol       | ✓ Lie on a soft sleep surface                                   |
| ✓ Take drugs          | ✓ Lie on an water bed, sofa or armchair                         |
| ✓ Are a smoker        | ✓ Share a sleep surface with more than one person or with a pet |
| ✓ Are extremely tired |   |



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) & Answers

The following questions & answers along with the recommended resources can provide you with further information on healthy and safe sleep for infants.



**1. | My infant does not always follow her sleep routine.  
What can I do?**

- An infant can change her sleep routine due to: illness, teething, growth spurts, travelling and house guests, etc.
- Return to the routine and adapt the routine to fit your growing infant's needs and family circumstances.
- Be patient and consistent when reinforcing a sleep routine and responding to your infant's cues. Re-establishing a routine can take up to a week or two.
- Any routine is not guaranteed to ensure that your infant falls asleep or stays asleep longer.

## 2. | I want to share my bed with my infant to breastfeed. Is this ok?

- It is ok to breastfeed your infant where you sleep. This can make breastfeeding easier and help you respond faster to your infant's cues for feeding and comfort.
- When you are ready to go to sleep, return your infant to his crib, cradle or bassinet. It is the safest place for your infant to sleep.
- Ask your partner to move your baby back to the crib, cradle or bassinet after you are done breastfeeding.



## 3. | We need to travel with our infant. Is this ok?



- It is ok to travel with your infant. Be sure to provide a safe sleep environment for your infant at all times. If no crib is available you can place your infant on a blanket on the floor.
- Playpens are not a safe place for an infant to sleep. Playpens advertised as portable cribs do not meet the same safety requirements and are not as durable as cribs.
- Car seats or any other devices that keep the infant seated or in a semi-reclined position are not made for unsupervised sleep. Sleeping in a sitting position can cause your baby's head to fall forward which can make it hard for your baby to breathe.

## 4. | Can I swaddle my infant?

- Swaddling can help to calm and settle some infants.
- Follow your infant's cues, and don't wrap if your infant resists.
- Use a lightweight blanket and dress your infant in a light sleeper or onesie to avoid overheating.
- Swaddle your infant loosely, so that he can flex his legs. Keep his head uncovered.
- See page 9 for safe sleep practices.
- Stop swaddling by age 2 months, before your infant starts to try to roll.
- Talk to health care provider about swaddling your infant.





### 5. | I am afraid that my infant is cold if I do not cover her.

- It is important that your infant is not too hot during sleep. Overheating is a risk factor for SIDS. It's recommended to dress your infant in a fitted one-piece sleepwear and to set the room temperature so it is comfortable for you.
- If you choose to use a sleep sack, follow the manufacturer recommendations and choose the correct size. You want to avoid the risk of your infant slipping into the sack and covering her head.



### 6. | Should I give a pacifier to my infant?

- Many infants never use a pacifier.
- Pacifiers can interfere with breastfeeding. Be sure to talk to your health care provider if you are thinking of using a pacifier with your baby.
- Sometimes parents try to get their infant to go longer between feeding by using a pacifier or soother. This can be a problem because your infant might not get enough to eat, and the volume of breastmilk may decrease.
- Do not tie the pacifier ribbon or cord to the infant's clothing since the ribbon or cord can get wrapped around the infant's neck and can cause a strangulation hazard. Inspect the pacifier frequently and throw it away when it starts to wear out.
- Keep pacifiers clean as they can be a source of infection when they come in contact with many different surfaces.

### 7. | I do not want my infant to have flat spots on her head. Can I put her on her stomach?

- Supervised tummy time during play time is important to develop healthy muscles and helps to prevent your baby from developing plagiocephaly, also known as flat head.
- You can start tummy time right from birth as part of your infant's daily play routine. For example, try placing your infant on her tummy for short periods after a diaper change.
- Gradually increase the time on her tummy as she gets older. It is important to always supervise your infant.
- Avoid long periods in sitting positions like in the car seat, a stroller, a bouncer, etc. When your infant is awake give her lots of cuddle time.
- Each day switch the end of the crib where you place your infant's head. Your infant will naturally turn her head towards the door so she can see you coming. It is not necessary to change her head position when she is sleeping. No positioning aids, like blanket rolls or positional devices should be used.
- Consult your health care provider if your infant develops plagiocephaly.



Tummy Time

### 8. | When my infant rolls over do I need to reposition her on her back?

- As infants get older they are usually able to turn over onto their tummy by themselves. This can occur around 3-4 months or may be even sooner.
- When this happens you do not need to reposition your infant onto her back to sleep.
- Always place your infant to sleep on her back in her crib.
- Increase your infant's supervised tummy time when she can roll over in both directions. This will help your infant to develop healthy muscles and master new skills.



### 9. | Placing my fussy infant on her stomach helps to calm her. Is this ok?

- You can place a fussy infant skin-to-skin on your chest. The warmth and close contact will likely help to calm her. Always be sure that her nose is clear and that she can breathe easily.
- When you are ready to go to sleep, dress your infant and place her on her back, in her crib, cradle or bassinet. It is the safest place for your infant to sleep.
- A fussy infant can be exhausting for parents since they seem to sleep less. Talk to your health care provider to help you find solutions.



### 10. | Do we have to separate twins at home when they are sleeping?

- The safest way to put twins to sleep at home is to place them in their own crib, cradle or bassinet.
- If you choose to place your twins on the same sleeping surface place one infant with feet at the head of the crib and the other twin with feet at the bottom of the crib.
- When one of the babies can roll over, provide them with separate cribs.



**11. | Why would my infant get hooked on white noise?  
Why does it seem to work?**

- If you use white noise every time your infant falls asleep he will begin to recognize it as part of the routine that signals that bedtime is approaching. It will then be more difficult to get him to sleep in situations where you can't provide him with white noise.
- White noise can be used as a tool when nothing else seems to be settling your infant.
- White noise may work at times to diminish the distraction of other surrounding noises and for some infants white noise can be comforting.
- Some white noise machines can produce sound at a level that is damaging to hearing. To be safe, use white noise machines at the lowest possible volume.





## Resources

Below is a list of resources for further information on healthy sleep practices for parents and infants and how to reduce the risks of SIDS and other sleep related causes of infant death.



### Safe Sleep

- **Public Health Agency of Canada: Safe Sleep**  
[www.publichealth.gc.ca/safesleep](http://www.publichealth.gc.ca/safesleep)
- **Safe Sleep video**  
[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/dca-dea/stages-etapes/childhood-enfance\\_0-2/sids/ss-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/dca-dea/stages-etapes/childhood-enfance_0-2/sids/ss-eng.php)
- **Canadian Paediatric Society: Caring for Kids**  
[www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/safe\\_sleep\\_for\\_babies](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/safe_sleep_for_babies)  
[www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/never\\_shake\\_a\\_baby](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/never_shake_a_baby)
- **Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario Health Education Fact Sheet**  
– **Working with Families to Promote Safe Sleep for Infants 0-12 Months of Age**  
[www.rnao.ca/bpg/guidelines/safe-sleep-practices-infants](http://www.rnao.ca/bpg/guidelines/safe-sleep-practices-infants)
- **Baby's Breath**  
[www.babysbreathcanada.ca](http://www.babysbreathcanada.ca)
- **Safe to Sleep:**  
[www.nichd.nih.gov/sts/Pages/default.aspx/](http://www.nichd.nih.gov/sts/Pages/default.aspx/)

### Safety

- **Health Canada – Is Your Child Safe? Series**  
[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pubs/cons/child-enfant/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pubs/cons/child-enfant/index-eng.php)
- **Canadian Paediatric Society: Keeping Kids Safe**  
[www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/kidssafe-index](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/kidssafe-index)  
[www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/pacifiers](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/pacifiers)

### Healthy Sleep

- **Canadian Paediatric Society – Caring for Kids**  
[www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/healthy\\_sleep\\_for\\_your\\_baby\\_and\\_child](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/healthy_sleep_for_your_baby_and_child)
- **National Sleep Foundation**  
[www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

### Breastfeeding

- **Best Start Resource Centre**
  - **Breastfeeding Matters: An important guide to breastfeeding for women and their families**  
[www.beststart.org/resources/breastfeeding/](http://www.beststart.org/resources/breastfeeding/)
  - **Breastfeeding for the Health and Future of Our Nation**  
[www.beststart.org/resources/breastfeeding/](http://www.beststart.org/resources/breastfeeding/)
  - **Bilingual Online Ontario Breastfeeding Services directory**  
[www.ontariobreastfeeds.ca](http://www.ontariobreastfeeds.ca)
- **La Leche League Canada**  
[www.lllc.ca](http://www.lllc.ca)

## Alcohol and Substance Use

- **Best Start Resource Centre**
  - **Be Safe: Have an Alcohol-free Pregnancy; Mixing Alcohol and Breastfeeding; Mocktails for Mom**  
[http://en.beststart.org/for\\_parents/are-you-or-your-partner-pregnant](http://en.beststart.org/for_parents/are-you-or-your-partner-pregnant)
  - **Prescription Drug Misuse in Pregnancy and Parenting**  
[www.beststart.org/resources/aboriginal\\_health.html](http://www.beststart.org/resources/aboriginal_health.html)

## Immunization

- **A Parent's Guide to Immunization**  
[www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/parent-guide-vaccination.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/parent-guide-vaccination.html)
- **Ontario's free immunization program**  
[www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/immunization/schedule.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/immunization/schedule.aspx)

## Smoking

- **Canadian Lung Association – Smoking & tobacco**  
[www.lung.ca/protect-protegez/tobacco-tabagisme\\_e.php](http://www.lung.ca/protect-protegez/tobacco-tabagisme_e.php)
- **Prevention of Gestational and Neonatal Exposure to Tobacco Smoke (PREGNETS)**  
[www.pregnets.org](http://www.pregnets.org)

## Mental Health

- **Canadian Paediatric Society – Caring for Kids**  
[www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/depression\\_in\\_pregnant\\_women\\_and\\_mothers](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/depression_in_pregnant_women_and_mothers)
- **Canadian Mental Health Association**  
[www.cmha.ca/mental\\_health/postpartum-depression/](http://www.cmha.ca/mental_health/postpartum-depression/)
- **Best Start Resource Centre**
  - **Life With a New Baby Is Not Always What You Expect – Booklet**
  - **Managing Depression – A Self-help Skills Resource for Women Living With Depression During Pregnancy, After Delivery and Beyond**  
[http://en.beststart.org/for\\_parents/do-you-have-baby-0-12-months](http://en.beststart.org/for_parents/do-you-have-baby-0-12-months)



**Local public health unit: 1-800-267-8097**

[www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx)

**Motherisk: 1-877-FAS-INFO (1-877-327-4636)**

[www.motherisk.org](http://www.motherisk.org)

**Smokers Help Line: 1-877-513-5333**

[www.smokershelpline.ca](http://www.smokershelpline.ca)

**Drug and Alcohol Helpline: 1-800-565-8603**

[www.drugandalcoholhelpline.ca](http://www.drugandalcoholhelpline.ca)



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