

# Sleep Matters

*1 in 4 families experience sleep problems and it is not a reflection on you as a parent or a failing. Child Sleep Consultant, Lucy Wolfe outlines a few of the reasons behind sleeping problems and offers some sympathetic child-centred, solutions without leaving your little one to cry, or using controlled crying techniques.*

Sleeplessness and parenting are a given. When you become a parent, you expect that your life will be different and most certainly you can expect to be awake at night in the beginning. There is a point though, that your waking baby, should no longer be waking, and you and your family should begin to enjoy solid stretches of sleep from your child. When this doesn't happen naturally, as is often the case, the baby continues to wake out of habit. It is accurate to say

that a full term healthy baby aged from 6 months is physically capable of sleeping an 11-12 hour stretch at night without waking. This is not an unrealistic expectation as a parent and most certainly by 9 months, your full term healthy baby "should" sleep through and not be waking at night. At this age, in order to grow and develop well, their little bodies need on average 11-12 hours uninterrupted sleep at night and another 2.5-3 hours during the day. Sleep disturbances in infants and children manifest in many ways. The reasons behind sleeping

problems stem from the fact that sleep is a learned behaviour, like talking. Your behaviour at bedtime and especially your response to your child's night time awakenings play a big part in consolidating your child's sleep patterns. Your child must learn how to put him or herself to sleep at bedtime and then back to sleep when they come into a light sleep during their sleep cycles throughout the night. Unfortunately, very quickly children become used to the parent "doing" something for them in order to get them to sleep and then they are not able to self settle during the night and you the parent are called on



to help them go back to sleep. If your baby or young child does not sleep well at night it has a knock-on effect on not just the child, but the whole family - lack of sleep and extra stress for you and other family members. Poor quality and quantity of sleep in older children has been linked to problems in learning, emotional development and growth, so more emphasis on the importance of your child's sleep should be observed.

Most children's sleep problems are behavioural in nature and with consistency can usually be solved by addressing the parents' responses. You can begin to gently shape your baby's sleep from about 12 weeks, without compromising your parental values. It is useful to not always feed your baby when they are going to sleep, but upon waking sometimes as well. You should establish soothing

techniques other than feeding, such as swaddling, shushing or swaying. At least once a day you should try to let your baby fall asleep unassisted. It is also very important that your baby gets the right amount of sleep during the day. These small habits can help your baby have the right sleep start and foster healthy sleep hygiene from very early on.

#### BIO

*Lucy Wolfe is a Certified Gentle Sleep Coach and Owner of Sleep Matters - Help Your Child Sleep. Lucy offers personal consultations, skype consults, workshops and runs Expectant and New Parent Sleep Craft Classes. For solutions for a great night's sleep check out [www.sleepmatters.ie](http://www.sleepmatters.ie)*

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## TOP TIPS...

### ...for Sleeptime

- *An age appropriate bedtime. Some time between 7pm-8pm is a natural bedtime for a young child. Although this doesn't always fit in with our modern lifestyle, efforts should be made to ensure that the time your child goes to bed is appropriate to what your child's body actually needs. Missing your child's sleep window can make it hard for them to go asleep and to stay asleep*
- *A relaxing and calm bedtime routine should be established. A sequence of events focused on helping to wind the child down and get them ready for sleep, instead of doing something to put them to sleep like rocking, nursing, walking them to sleep*
- *Create a peaceful sleeping environment that is conducive to sleep-adequately dark, avoiding bright external lights that can affect the sleep hormone even while sleeping. Remove any distractions, scary pictures, mirrors and images.*
- *Try to avoid night time feedings once they are no longer necessary. Frequent feeding throughout the night may result in a persistent requirement for night feeds with conditioned hunger, increased wetting and recurrent night-time waking*
- *Put the child to bed more awake than asleep at sleep time. This will allow your child to learn how to fall asleep on their own. Stay close to them and be emotionally, physically and verbally responsive to them while they perfect the skill*
- *Be consistent in your responses during the night. An inconsistent response during the night will result in frequent night-time waking. Changing your child's sleeping location throughout the night, lying down with them, sometimes feeding them, sometimes allowing them to play, when they should be asleep will confuse them and ingrain night time activity*
- *Ensure adequate daytime sleep when appropriate for your child's age. Parents often are not sure how much sleep their baby should have during the day-the following guidelines might help-6-12 months 2.5-3 hours, 12-18 2 ¼- 2.5 hours, 18-24-2 ¼ hours, 2 years-2 hours, 3 years 1.5 hours*

