



Dream to Sleep

You're not alone if you're having difficulty getting your baby to sleep through the night. Paediatric sleep consultant **Lucy Wolfe** explains how it is possible to get your child to sleep by establishing healthy habits right from the beginning

MUM'S STORY

Nichola Curran Mulligan



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My now three-and-a-half year old did not sleep a full night until he

was 18- months-old. I used to just give in to him at whatever hour of the morning it was and let him into my bed. One day, I just said enough is enough and put the foot down. I created a routine and stuck to it no matter what. He soon realised I meant business and now sleeps all night in his own bed now. You need to set the boundaries and not give in!”

Sleep and parenting is the biggest challenge faced by parents with an otherwise healthy child. Unfortunately, it is probably the most discussed and debated topic among parents and often babies get labelled with either being ‘good’ or ‘bad’ depending on their sleeping patterns.

Conflicting advice on the internet and from our well-meaning friends and family members contributes to the unease that we feel and is compounded by the lack of sleep that is a given when we become parents.

It's individual

Firstly, it is important to be aware that with sleep and individual babies there is a large amount of variability and new parents shouldn't get consumed with what their baby 'should' be doing or what their first or second child did or what next door's baby does either. Sleep is temperament-based and what works for one child may not necessarily work for another.

Getting into the habit

Although sleep problems are common, they do not necessarily need to be endured; often-small subtle changes can help influence better

sleep for the whole family. It is not about having unrealistic expectations and trying to get your baby to do something they are not ready to do. It is more about creating healthy sleep habits that form a foundation and promote consolidated sleep as soon as your baby is physically capable of doing so.

The good news is that all babies are biologically programmed to sleep. So if you are worried that your baby doesn't seem to need to sleep, the reverse is typically true. It is just how we approach it that makes the difference. Some babies are inherently efficient at going to sleep and staying asleep and others need some gentle persuasion.

Learning to sleep

Just like learning to roll over, sit up, stand, walk and talk; children reach these milestones at different times and the same can be said for sleep. Sleep itself though is behavioural in nature and often parents inadvertently interfere with the natural development of sleep maturation. Falling asleep unassisted is a learned skill and if we don't allow our babies to develop that skill set, they will not be able to transition through their sleep phases and get the right quality of sleep that their little bodies need.

So what can you do to gently help them on this journey?

Initially, it is a good idea to have some sort of routine and structure to your day. Often the thought of having a rigid schedule unnerves parents, but it is not routine for routine sake, it is because of our biological clock. Babies and young children rely on their primary caregivers to regulate their body clock. Having a flexible feeding and sleeping schedule can help to synchronise your baby's body clock and get their sleep patterns matching their body's requirements, this in turn can help them fall asleep more easily and stay asleep for longer periods.

– Pay attention to your baby's body language.

Watch out for sleep signals: yawning, rubbing eyes, staring, cuddling into you, becoming more vocal, less active are all classic signs that they are getting tired. All involuntary, unconscious actions on their part, but essentially, it is their body telling them that it is time to go to sleep