

BABIES to SLEEP

Sleep. It's What Every New Twin Parent Dreams About!

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In the many years that I have worked with expectant and new parents of multiples, no topic has garnered more attention than that of sleep. Expectant parents are warned about the lack of sleep; new parents are walking around exhausted; seasoned parents with sleeping babies cherish the rest they are now getting and view it as something more precious than gold!

Sleep. It's such a natural thing. Then why can it be so challenging to get a pair of babies to nap well and sleep through the night? In my workshops, sleep seminars and private coaching sessions, I frequently see the same pitfalls and sleep 'mistakes' that parents make. In defense of all new, tired parents and those of us that have been there; we're just trying to get through a day (and night). So what if the babies fall asleep at the breast, end up sleeping in our bed or are driven around in our cars for their two-hour naps?

Establishing good sleep habits now will provide lifelong benefits for your children. If only someone could summarize what you CAN do to help your babies learn how to sleep! How about a nice little book of instructions? Well...consider this your 'Owner's Manual' for your babies' sleep!!

Keep in mind that all babies are different. Some are born premature, so it's important that you take their adjusted age into account when setting expectations. Some are developmentally behind (even within the twin pair) whether they were categorized as 'preemies' or not. Boys and girls might attain skill levels in different orders and different paces, some need soothing one way, while others need it delivered completely differently. The list of variables is long. Suffice it to say, however, that if your babies are a minimum of 12 weeks old (adjusted) and a minimum of 12-15 pounds, they are ready to take on some of what is described below

Remember to pace yourselves! If you take on too much at once, you and your babies may become overwhelmed, and you may throw in the towel too soon! However, armed with these recommendations, you can begin to design and implement a plan that will lead to a good night's rest for all.

1. Develop a good daily schedule and follow it!

For the first 8-10 weeks or so (or longer if your multiples were born early) just trying to get babies through a feeding is a massive undertaking. Who knew that feeding a

newborn could take nearly an hour and that half that time would be spent trying to keep them awake to get through that feeding!

But once your babies have come out of their lazy, sleepy state, you will see that they are more alert, more awake and more efficient in their eating. You might see bits of a 'schedule' emerging. And as that further evolves, you'll realize that keeping your babies' naps and feedings evenly spaced will be the first steps toward helping them develop a rhythm to their day.

At about three months old babies are eating about every three hours from the beginning of one feed to the beginning of the next. Their naps occur every two and a half to three hours or so from the end of one nap to the beginning of the next. Each nap may last two to two and a half hours in addition to a shorter one right after the first morning feed for 45 minutes to an hour.

2. Establish an appropriate bedtime

Parents often mistakenly think that if they keep babies up really late, maybe even as late as 10:00 or 11:00 o'clock at night, that they will sleep well into the morning. Lo and behold, the opposite generally occurs. The ideal bedtime for babies is between 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. Don't worry that if you put them down earlier they will wake up earlier. As it turns out, when babies are put to bed at a time that is right for their bodies, they will enjoy more productive and restorative sleep. If you are the family that is holding out bedtime in the hopes of longer stretches, back up! But back up in 5-15 minute increments. It won't do to announce to your now four-month olds that bedtime is suddenly 6:30 p.m. when it's been 10:30 for months. Assess your days and determine the best bedtime for them.

3. Ensure productive naps to help night sleep

Babies who are not taking good daytime naps probably won't be good night sleepers. Contrary to what one might think, good naps actually contribute to good night's sleep. Babies who go into the night well rested, not overly tired, are better prepared to sleep through 'til morning.

4. Know babies daily milk intake

Babies require a certain amount of milk daily. By the time solid foods are introduced, most babies are consuming between 24-32 ounces of milk depending on their weight. The calculation for determining how much milk your babies should be drinking daily is 2-2.5 ounces multiplied by each pound baby weighs. For example, a twelve pound baby would typically consume 24-30 ounces in 24-hours. If your babies aren't taking in this much during the day, it's unlikely that they will be able to sleep through the night.

5. Put babies down for sleep drowsy but awake

By 10 weeks (adjusted), parents should try and put babies down for naps drowsy but awake at least once a day. By twelve weeks or so, work toward putting babies down to sleep drowsy, but awake each and every time. This helps them develop the skills to take themselves from drowsy to asleep. By becoming aware of the sensation of 'falling asleep',

when they wake in the middle of a nap or at night, they will have an easier time putting themselves back to sleep unaided.

6. Establish good nap and night routines

Babies thrive on routine, so make sure to deliver consistent nap and night routines to your babies that let them know that it's time to wind down and rest. Be sure that the elements of your routine are ones that can be offered consistently. It is important that the entire routine be delivered to the babies in the room where they will sleep. I often see parents delivering babies' routines in several places in the house; by keeping it one location, the babies can settle in and relax without a change of scenery which can distract or stimulate them.

7. Read and respond to your babies' sleepy cues

Our babies communicate with us in many ways. One of those ways is by displaying cues that indicate that they are tired. Typical cues include yawning, rubbing eyes and crying. Other cues that parents don't often attribute to their babies sleepiness include hair twirling, pulling on their ears, turning away from play, redness under the eyes or at the eyebrows. Many parents wait until babies start to display one or more of these signs before attempting to put their babies down for their naps. The trick here is to **anticipate** these cues and get babies down **before** they show their tired signs.

You can do this by tracking for several days when your babies show signs of tiredness (either the time on the clock, or the length of time from the previous waking). Once you have an idea of how long babies are awake **before** starting to become tired, you can begin getting them ready for their nap and catch their sleep window thus increasing your chances of babies going down to sleep with little fuss.

8. Check for environmental impediments

Look around your babies' nursery. Is it dark enough for them? Is the room temperature between 65-68 degrees as recommended by the National SIDS Alliance? Are babies comfortably dressed? Are there any stimulating posters, mobiles or other distractions in their view? Sometimes sleep can be disrupted or delayed if one of these details is off.

9. Introduce self soothing techniques

Do your babies require a pacifier? Have you introduced a transitional object or 'lovey' into their routine? Something they can derive comfort from in your absence? The vast majority of babies will connect with some sort of cuddle object if introduced and utilized properly. Make sure that you are consistent in offering them a lovey. When holding, cuddling, or relaxing with babies keep the object close at hand (even between you and the baby) so they begin to make a connection between you and them and their transitional object. When you put them down to sleep, let them take their lovey with them. It will feel like a part of you is next to them.

Be sure to check with your pediatrician about any concerns you have about putting this small object in bed with your children. He can share his recommendations for when it is safe to begin doing so. Prior to that, however, you can still utilize the transitional object

during bonding time so that your babies start to become familiar with the item. Some mothers will even sleep with the object in their shirt or next to them initially, so it more quickly takes on their scent.

10. Ensure consistency to improve your chances of success.

Those that experience the greatest success are parents who are consistent in the process and don't deviate from the routine or the elements outlined above until quality sleep is consistent. Once you can comfortably say, "My babies are sleeping through the night." or "My babies are consistently enjoying restorative and productive naps" then deviating from time to time won't cause your efforts to be for naught. However, it is important to note that there may be a back lash later in the evening, for example if you take babies out to a party instead of having them home for their nap.

Often when parents begin to see success, they start to ease up on their efforts. Don't allow yourself to become complacent too soon. All your hard won success could be derailed if you start to deviate too soon and you might find yourself having to start from 'square one' again.

11. Stick to one sleep 'training' methodology

There are so many sleep training books in the market place that it is often hard to choose which one to read. Everyone you speak with has their preference and you might find yourself choosing some concepts from one technique and some from another. As a result, you might end up quite frustrated because the sum of these different parts doesn't add up to a whole, quality sleep plan. If you choose Ferber, follow his sleep spacings. If you prefer Elizabeth Pantley, follow her protocol for 'intervention' and so on.

Regardless of which method you choose, the tools described above still apply. All babies thrive on routine, require adequate nourishment and need to nap at well spaced intervals throughout the day. If you utilize the first nine suggestions, you and your babies will be well on your way to a good night's sleep, and may never find yourself having to select a 'sleep training' method.

Leo J. Burke is quoted as saying, "*People who say they sleep like a baby, usually don't have one!*" But your babies **can** be good sleepers; they may just need a little guidance from you. Put forth the effort and it will pay off. It may be a challenge you never anticipated, but done right, a good night's sleep is just around the corner!

Karen Schwarzbach is the mother of three sons; 18 year old fraternal twins and a 16 year old. She has been mentoring parents of multiples for over 17 years and is the founder of Babies to Sleep, a sleep consultancy. You can learn more about her services at www.babiestosleep.com or contact her at: karen@babiestosleep.com or 925-330-5660.

