Baby Basics: How to get your baby to sleep through the night

Continuing our series on the essentials of life…

If you have a newborn, stop reading and go back to feeding. It's too early for your baby to sleep through the night. All babies lose a little weight in the first couple days of life, but then they are expected to gain. In fact, you may find that you need to awaken your baby to eat every couple of hours to eat in order to stabilize her weight loss. (see our prior post on breast feeding your newborn and our formula feeding post). While you feed your newborn, listen here to understand newborn sleep patterns:

Click here for our podcast – Sleep During the First Six Months

So, when to expect your baby to sleep longer at night? Usually after three months, your baby naturally takes more milk at

each feeding and thus lasts longer between feedings. And once your baby is at least six months old, your baby may be able to sleep through the night. Set reasonable expectations. For some babies, sleeping through the night means six hours, for others ten.

At six months, object permanence fully emerges. Your baby will understand that you are somewhere even when you are not within sight. This is why he laughs hysterically when you play peek-a-boo with him. If he is dependent on you rocking him or feeding him to fall asleep, then he will look for you every time he awakens for help falling back to sleep. Also, don't be fooled into thinking that because your baby nurses or drinks from a bottle at every night time wakening, he must be hungry. Usually he's just looking for a way to fall back to sleep.

Training starts with making sure your baby knows how to fall asleep on his own. Make sure he can fall asleep on his own at the beginning of the night. Then train for the middle of the night. Above all, make sure you and your partner are on board with the same training strategy. Keep bedtime roughly the same time every night, and start the bedtime routine before your baby is crying from exhaustion so he can enjoy this time with you. A typical bedtime routine for an older infant is bath (if it is a bath night), formula/breastfeed, wipe gums/brush teeth, read book, lullaby, kiss, and then bed. The exact order and events do not matter much, just finish the routine BEFORE your baby falls asleep. Lay him down on his back awake so that he has an opportunity to fall asleep on his own.

Don't be frustrated if you try to sleep train for a few days and give up. There is no such thing as "missing" a golden window of opportunity to sleep train. If it's not working out this week, try again next week.

Ultimately, use these principles behind a soothing, consistent bedtime and bedtime routine all the way through high school!

Sweet dreams.

Click here for our podcast- Sleep from 6mo to toddler

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