

Sleep Problem from Feeding Until Asleep

Definition

- A baby over 6 months old who can't sleep through the night (at least 7 straight hours)
- Wakes up and cries one or more times a night to be fed
- Can only return to sleep if you hold and feed them
- Sometimes called a trained night feeder

Health Information

Cause of a Trained Night Feeder

- The main cause is being breast-fed or bottle-fed until asleep at bedtime and for naps.
- If the last memory before sleep is sucking the breast or bottle, the child does not learn to comfort themselves and fall asleep without the breast or bottle.
- Therefore, when the baby normally wakes up at night, even though they are not hungry, they are not able to go back to sleep without feeding as a pacifier. All children have 4 or 5 normal wake-ups per night at the end of each sleep cycle.
- Age limits how long a baby can fast. As babies become older, they can normally sleep longer without a feed.
- By 4 months of age, most bottle-fed babies can sleep 7 hours without a feeding.
- By 6 months, most breast-fed babies can sleep 7 hours without a feeding.
- Normal children of this age do not need calories during the night to stay healthy.

Care Advice

1. **Separate Feeding from Falling Asleep:**
 - All sleep re-training starts at bedtime and naptime.
 - Feed your baby as the first step in the bedtime ritual, rather than the last step.
 - Also, feed them in a different room with the lights on.
 - Your baby's last waking memory needs to be of the crib and mattress, not of the breast or bottle.
 - The best sequence is feed, read, bedtime ritual, then put in crib.
2. **Put Your Baby in the Crib Drowsy but Awake:**
 - At naptime and bedtime, place your baby in the crib drowsy but awake.
 - This is when you need to re-train your child to be a good sleeper.
 - Start with a pleasant bedtime ritual. But when your baby starts to look drowsy, place them in the crib.
 - Your child's last waking memory needs to be of the crib and mattress, not of you.
 - If your baby is very fussy, rock them until they settle down or are calm, but stop before they are fully asleep.
 - They need to learn to put themselves to sleep. Your baby needs to develop this self-comforting skill so they can put themselves back to sleep when they normally wake up at night.

3. **Visit Your Baby for Crying:**
 - If your baby is crying, visit them as often as needed until asleep. This is part of sleep training.
 - Make the visits loving, but brief.
 - Don't stay in your child's room longer than 1 minute.
 - Act sleepy. Whisper, "Shhh, everyone's sleeping." Add something positive, such as "Love you," or "You're almost asleep."
 - Do all of this in a loving way with a calm, soft voice.
 - Try not to show any normal anger or frustration during these visits.
 - Return every 5 to 10 minutes. Gradually lengthen the time between your visits.
4. **Once Placed in the Crib, Do Not Take Out Again:**
 - Naptime and bedtime are the best times for sleep training.
 - Do not give in. Do not play with your baby or bring him to your bed.
 - Even with your visits, most babies fuss and cry 30 to 90 minutes before they fall asleep.
5. **For Crying During the Middle of the Night, Temporarily Hold Your Baby Until Asleep:**
 - Until your child learns how to put themselves to sleep at naps and bedtime, make the middle-of-the-night wakings as easy as possible for everyone.
 - If they fuss for more than 5 or 10 minutes, go in briefly and reassure them.
 - If they cry longer, take your child out of the crib and hold them until asleep. You don't have to do sleep training in the middle of the night.
 - But don't take them out of the room, entertain them or talk to them very much.
6. **Provide a Nighttime Feeding Only if Last Fed 5 or More Hours Ago:**
 - Any healthy 4 month old baby can fast that long.
 - Make this nighttime feeding boring and brief (no longer than 20 minutes).
 - Stop it before your child falls asleep, and replace it with holding until asleep.
 - Stop giving your baby any bottle in bed. If you feed your child at bedtime, don't let them hold the bottle.
7. **Gradually Lengthen the Time between Daytime Feedings to 3 or 4 Hours:**
 - You can't lengthen the time between nighttime feedings if the time between daytime feedings is short.
 - If a baby is used to frequent feedings during the day, they will get hungry during the night.
 - Phase out any comfort feeding or grazing.
8. **Last Step - Phase out the Nighttime Feeding:**
 - Phase out the nighttime feeding only after your child can put themselves to sleep without feeding.
 - Grazing must also be gone and the time between daytime feedings must be more than 3 hours.
 - Gradually phase out the last nighttime feeding over 2 weeks by gradually reducing the amount.
9. **Prevent Baby Bottle Tooth Decay:**
 - Severe tooth decay is the most serious side effect of poor sleep training.
 - Never give your baby a bottle of milk or juice in the crib. Same goes for sippy cups.
10. **What to Expect:**
 - Be consistent and you will see improvement within a week.
 - Expect some crying during the transition.

Call Your Doctor If

- Your child is not gaining enough weight
- Crying becomes worse after 1 week of this program
- Your child is not sleeping longer after you try this program for 2 weeks
- You have other questions or concerns

Pediatric Care Advice

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