

Hunger

Children often wake out of hunger. In a younger baby this is understandable, but what people often do not realise is that hunger can become a habit. For example, if you or I got in to the habit of having a midnight snack and did that consistently, pretty soon we would feel hungry at that time, simply because we had got used to digesting food and fluid at a particular time. It's why we can have such set meal times and if lunch is late for whatever reason, we really begin to feel hungry. So, nutritionally speaking your child may not *need* to feed at night, but they have got into the habit of it, and so genuinely are waking out of hunger. It is therefore not reasonable to expect your child to just give up this habit, without a gradual reduction in the volume of feed to wean them off their hunger habit.

Sensory needs

Some babies are especially sensitive to external stimuli, their own sense of self, and other internal cues. Many of us have senses that are over or under developed – that's why some people seem to have a very strong sense of smell, whilst others appear oblivious. The following strategies may help:

- Rocking
- Bouncing while sitting on a yoga ball
- Firm massage
- White noise
- Rhythmic patting or stroking

We hope this has given you a few ideas, but if you need further support please call our:

Health Visitor advice line
Mon –Friday 9:30-1pm 0208 979 6464
www.cshsurrey.co.uk

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Sleep

General sleep tips for parents



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You have asked for some help with establishing a better pattern of sleep. It is important to remember to consider your child's age when you are wondering whether their sleeping patterns are appropriate. Ask a health visitor, or community nursery nurse, or see <https://www.isisonline.org.uk> to work out what is 'normal'.

Don't forget, your child does not have a sleep problem if:

- They are not sleeping through the night at the same time as other people's babies
- You are feeding, rocking, holding them or pushing them in a pram to go to sleep – if you are happy with the situation
- Your parents, friends or family members say it is a problem

It is only a sleep problem if it is a problem for you!

Common Problems:

- Needing lots of help to sleep for every bedtime
- Waking several times, needing some intervention from you every time
- Getting enough daytime sleep, and being overtired at the end of the day

Possible reasons:

Children are creatures of habit.

They perceive a rhythm and a pace to their day and quickly establish patterns of behaviour. Once they do, you can begin to wean off the level of intervention it takes to get them to go to sleep, because they have come to expect sleep at a particular time of day, following a particular predictable ritual.



Parenting needs to be responsive and children cannot work out why your strategies may be different between day and night. So you will need to be consistent.

Environmental stress

Children pick up on nuances and changes in their environment, routine and our behaviour/stress levels. It doesn't matter how good an 'act' we think we're portraying, children can see through it. Do you have good support networks? Is there something stressful going on at home? Do you need to speak to your GP or health visitor?

Light sleepers

Babies have sleep cycles of about 40-60 minutes. They often sleep very lightly and wake up after just a short time. You can use this to your advantage, and for a couple of weeks, concentrate on getting to them before they fully awaken, and try to coax them into another sleep cycle – try soft shushing/patting/stroking. Set a watch if you have to, and go to them 5 minutes before you think they will wake to start your settling routine *before* they stir. Having some background noise often helps a light sleeper too – try a white noise machine, a fan, or dehumidifier.

Sleep rhythms

Children will tend to sleep deeply for the first 4-5 hours of the night, and thereafter wake every sleep cycle – 90-120 minutes. This is why often children will sleep well until about midnight but then is up every 2 hours all night. When they come to the end of a sleep cycle, they will usually expect the same sleep cue that they went to sleep with.

Developmental milestones

Children are constantly changing, going through developmental milestones, growing, teething and getting ill.

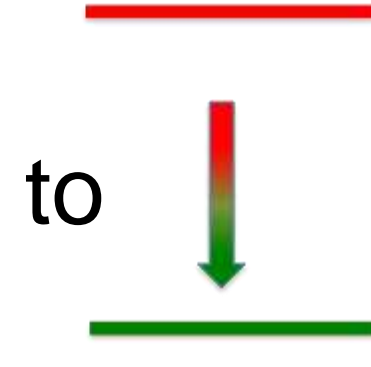
Developmental milestones could include:

- learning to roll
- learning to babble
- learning to sit up
- crawling
- standing up
- eating solid food

All these major changes usually bring on some more clingy behaviour, fussing and worsening sleep. Your child will look to you to be their source of security and consistency. At a time when it feels to them as if their whole world is changing – you stay comfortingly familiar and are a source of comfort to your child. **Your child's amazing brain is a work in progress! It's like a building site that has all the raw material, but needs to be built into a wonderfully beautiful structure!**

Children cannot 'self-soothe'.

Self-soothing is what we do to get ourselves from stressed to calm. It takes several years – at least 7-8 – for children to be able to use logic and reason, take deep breaths and get themselves calm.



Crying to sleep is not self-soothing. Some children will go to bed calm and drift off to sleep, but technically, this is not self-soothing. If children wake in the night and are distressed, it is normal to need parental help to calm down enough to be able to fall asleep. The goal therefore is to keep children calm so that the state of sleep can be achieved with minimal effort. At the same time, additional sleep triggers can be introduced so that calm falling asleep is more likely.

When trying to wean from a habitual sleep trigger which has become difficult for you to maintain – it is probably unfair to remove the sleep trigger without first introducing another way of calming down and going to sleep. So rather than remove the 'annoying' sleep trigger, try adding in several other sleep cues, tapping in to as many senses as possible, to create a multi-sensory distraction. You would then remove the one you find hard earlier and earlier and maintain the new ones.

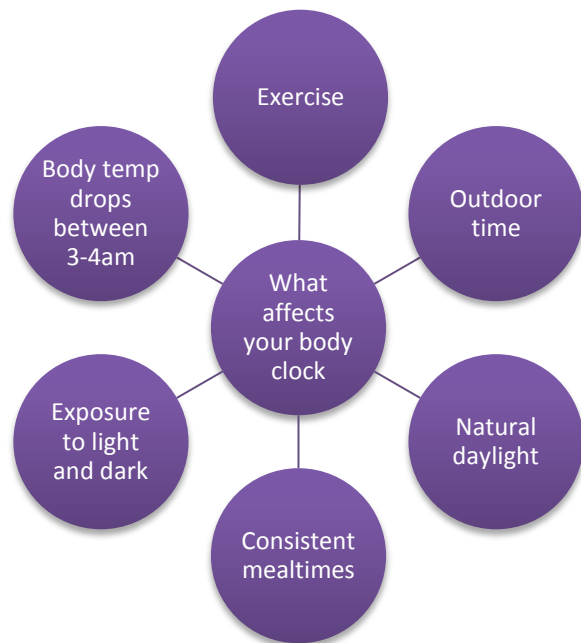
Children wake at the end of a sleep cycle.

Children, like adults, move in and out of sleep cycles alternating with light and deep sleep. We all wake several times per night, but most of us know how to fall asleep on our own, so in the morning we are not aware of having woken numerous times. When we do wake, we expect the same conditions that led us to fall asleep in the first place.

Inconsistent timings

Children, like all of us, benefit from a degree of consistency around timings. You don't need to schedule their every move, feed, activity and sleep, but it helps to have a loose routine to 'set' your body clock. **Try thinking of bedtime and naptimes with a 'grace period' of about 30 minutes either side of your target time to keep a loose structure but also offer some flexibility.**

Work with your child's body clock:



Overtiredness

Children also move in and out of the mood and the frame of mind to sleep. If you miss this critical window of time, it can take a long time and a lot of effort to get another window of opportunity. **The bedtime routine needs to be long enough to wind down, but not too long that it begins to lose focus. About 30-45 minutes is about right. Otherwise children may 'forget' that they are supposed to be calming down for bedtime!**

Don't skip naps in an effort to make your child more tired at bedtime – this often worsens sleep. Review the timings of your child's naps – are they: Too early? Too late? Too short? Too long?

Not tired enough

Some children simply do not need as much sleep as others. This can be especially frustrating as a parent, when you compare to the amount of sleep friends babies get, how early they 'slept through' and so on. It's really important to remember that sleep totals suggested in books, websites, health professionals and the internet represent the common averages in the general population. There will always be children who fit outside of these parameters. You can tell your child is someone who simply does not need a lot of sleep usually by two factors –

1) It takes a disproportionately long time to *get* your child to sleep, especially when compared to the length of sleep they then have, and,

2) What their temperament is like during the day. Children who have not had enough sleep are unsettled, clingy, and miserable and yawn or exhibit some other signs of tiredness. If your child does not appear tired in the day and functions well and is generally happy, then they are getting enough sleep. This then becomes something you have to learn to live with unfortunately! No amount of sleep coaching will make a child sleep more than they are biologically required to.