







"A healthy sleeping baby is key to a flourishing family. Our sleep strategy combines medical research with practical routines which assist parents achieve optimum sleep, feeding, growth and happiness in babies and children.

Background series

sleep summary: the first five years

"How much sleep is enough for brain development?"

The first five years of a child's life are fundamentally important. Children do some of their most important learning during these early years and by the age of five a child has developed much of their intellect, personality and many skills. The first five years are particularly important for the development of the child's brain.

Sleep plays a significant role in brain development and appropriate functioning. It is therefore important for children to get enough sleep.

This information sheet provides a general summary of sleep volumes from birth to five years.

Birth to three weeks

Assuming good weight gain, children should sleep between 16-21 hours per day. Children will wake two or three or four hourly on demand for feeds. Do not let a child sleep for more than four hours continuously during the day. Wake the child and offer a feed.

Four to eight weeks

The child begins to 'awaken' and will have recognisable 'Happy Wake Times' [HWT] [See Instructional Pamphlet, *Happy Wake Times*]. Feeding will still be quite flexible but the longest night sleep will expand during this month. Sleep volumes remain large and should total between 16-21 hours per day.

By six weeks a child will be able to recognise the difference between day and night. One of the major events in this month is the child's development of an emotional response to you. This is wonderful but there is a time where the child will 'put energy' into maximising parent contact time and this can become a problem.



Dr Brian Symon is The Babysleep Doctor. He has more than 30 years' experience working with parents and babies experiencing sleep, feeding, growth and/or behavioural issues. He is a specialist medical practitioner with a MD (PhD) in infant sleep. Dr Symon is well published in national and international medical and research journals having researched infant sleep problems throughout his medical career. He is the author of *Silent Nights, Overcoming Sleep Problems in Babies and Children* and has another book due for release in early 2015.

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The babysleep Doctor
... helping babies to sleep and families to flourish

Background series

"Children do some of their most important learning during these years…"

sleep summary: the first five years

Nine to 12 weeks

The child is having clear waking periods in the day. These are quite short still and the child can easily become overtired. See the Handout: Happy Wake Times.

Sleep volumes remain large and should be between 16-20 hours per day. The longest night sleep is similar to the child's age in weeks ie. six hours by six weeks, eight hours by eight weeks etc. By approximately three months of age children should have developed a long night-time sleep, which may still include a feed. This sleep should be approximately 12 hours in total [See Instructional Pamphlet, *The Perfect Night …*]. Feeding is still quite frequent as growth is still rapid. There may be 'cluster' feeding at dawn and dusk.

Four to eight months

This is generally a period of increasing stability. Routine is established. Sleep volumes should be between 16-18 hours per day. The night sleep is approximately 12 hours long with or without a night feed.

The majority of children should be having three day sleeps. These may total four or five or six hours of sleep in total.

Eight to 10 months

A period of transition. Sleep volumes should be between 15-18 hours per day. Before eight months the majority of children will have three day sleeps. By 10 months the majority will have stabilised on two. Transition may be a period of some 'untidiness'. This means that some days there are three sleeps and others there are two. Often it will be the third day sleep, the 'pre-dinner nap' that is dropped.

10 to 15 months

This is generally a period of stability. Sleep volumes should be between 14-16 hours per day.

The child has a 12-hour night, without a night feed and two day sleeps.

15 to 18 months

A period of transition. Sleep volumes should be between 14-16 hours per day.

The second day sleep is beginning to diminish. Both sleeps should be maintained for as long as possible but there is great variability between children as to the age at which they cease the second sleep. The sleep which is often lost first is the one which occurs in the afternoon. The time of initiating the first day sleep is still managed by the 'Happy Wake Time' concept.

In July 2013, the *British Medical Journal*, reported on a study demonstrating the relationship of sleep to brain development in children. Called the Millennium cohort Study, it followed 11,000 children. It showed that children who demonstrated irregular bedtimes up to the age of three were the most negatively affected when it came to reading, math skills and spatial awareness. When followed over time, they continued to lag developmentally even by the age of seven. The authors concluded that the first three years of life seem to be a particularly sensitive time for sleep and its relationship to brain development.

18 months to 36 months

This is a period of stability. Sleep volumes should be between 13-16 hours per day. The night sleep is stable at about 12 hours.

The single day sleep continues. The length of the day sleep varies considerably between children.

36 to 48 months

A period of transition. Sleep volumes should be between 12-15 hours per day. The day sleep may now be diminishing. There are days where the child needs that day sleep but it is not achieved. On these days, the child may respond to an early night.

By approximately age four the day sleep has been lost in the majority of children but in some children they may have a day sleep even up to school age.

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