



newborns



(too much!)



DON'T LOSE SLEEP

OVER GETTING YOUR BABY TO SLEEP

BY ANNE BURKLEY



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WOULDN'T IT BE GREAT if infants transitioned from sleeping in short stretches to sleeping through the night on their own? Hey, it could happen. There is always that lucky mom at the playground or at work who just shrugs her shoulders and says, "We didn't do anything; she just started sleeping through the night on her own at 6 weeks!"

Most parents, however, aren't so lucky. An infant's sleep cycle is short. It has to be, since little ones need to eat every two to four hours to sustain rapid growth and development. Even though it seems to last forever, the first few sleep-deprived months will pass quickly.

Though babies are not developmentally ready to sleep on any schedule but their own before they're 5 or 6 months old, some things will help set the stage for success when the time does come to

help your baby learn that sleep is a solo activity. In just two to three months, and sometimes less, an infant's sleeping and eating patterns will become regular. This is a good time to introduce a routine before your baby goes to sleep at night. Your baby will begin to associate this bedtime routine with sleep. It's also good to begin putting your baby to bed while she is tired, but not yet asleep. This allows her to get used to her sleeping environment while awake.

But just because your 4-month-old falls asleep in her crib when you lay her down awake doesn't mean that she will continue to be a star sleeper. "By 5 or 6 months of age, kids start to have a sense of separation anxiety, meaning if you are not there, they notice," says Dr. Faith Wilt, a pediatrician at JDC Pediatrics in Mechanicsburg.

It would seem counter-intuitive,

but developmentally this is actually a good time to begin sleep training, says Wilt. As infants start to grasp the abstract concept of you not being there, it can cause anxiety. This is an ideal opportunity to help them understand that this is not necessarily a bad thing.

Getting to Sleep

The first step is to teach your infant how to get to sleep on her own. "Teaching them to fall asleep on their own at the beginning of the night will help them fall back asleep in the middle of the night when they wake up and wonder where you are," says Wilt.

If you haven't already done so, establish a bedtime routine. When it is time to go to sleep, put your baby in the crib, sleepy but not sleeping, transition her from arms to crib with soothing touches and words and leave

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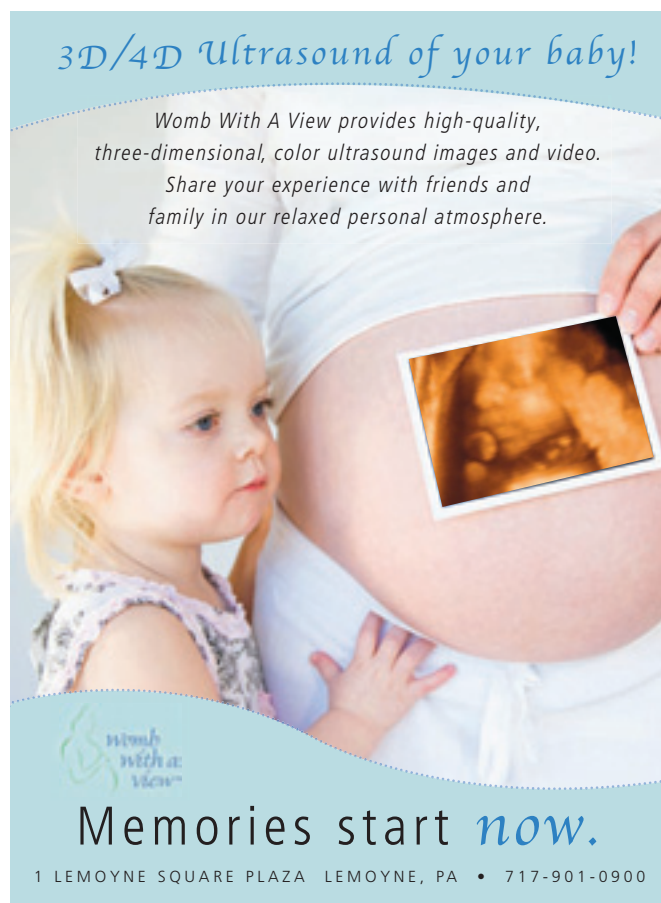
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Don't throw in the towel, warns Wilt. "If you make headway, don't give in, or you will erase the work that you've done."

the room. If she fusses or cries, give her a few minutes to calm down. If this doesn't happen, go back in and comfort her with words and gentle touches, but don't pick her up, and leave again. If in 10 minutes, your baby is still crying, says Wilt, go in again to console her. Wait 15 minutes before going in again, and every time thereafter, until your baby is able to fall asleep.

Of course, you know your baby best. "If the cries escalate and turn into hysterics, you may have to pick up your infant to get them to settle down," says Wilt. Once the baby has calmed down and is sleepy (not sleeping), lay her down and start over.

Staying Asleep

By 6 months, many infants are starting to give up overnight feedings, though they still may be waking up. If they are just passively sucking at the nipple or eating very little, they are ready to be weaned from middle-of-the-night snacks; however, if they are still eating heartily, it's OK to continue to feed them. Just don't let them fall asleep while eating and put them back to bed while they are still awake.

Everyone wakes up in the middle of the night, but babies have trouble getting back to sleep. When middle-of-the-night wakeups happen, wait five minutes to give baby an opportunity to settle and fall back asleep. If she is still awake and crying, go

in to soothe her, again without picking her up, and leave. Increase the time from 10 to 15 minutes, but not beyond 15 minutes, with each visit to her room.

Early in your endeavors, there may be a time-or five-that you have to pick up the baby to calm him or her down. Start the process over by laying baby down before she falls asleep. Don't throw in the towel, warns Wilt. "If you make headway, don't give in, or you will erase the work that you've done."

Remember, consistency and staying the course are the most important elements of success when sleep training. ■

Anne Burkley is a freelance writer from Harrisburg.

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