



the sleep **sisters**

YOUR NAP
GUIDE

Hi there! We are Kelly and Roz;
Level 5 OCN sleep practitioners,
and alumni of The London School
of Childcare Studies.

This guide will help you navigate
the often-tricky nap timings –
which change frequently as your
baby grows. We've included
some helpful tips on how to help
your baby get the daytime sleep
they need.



When the inevitable ‘how is your baby sleeping?’ question comes up, we all tend to think about nighttime sleep first. The truth is though, daytime naps are just as important as nighttime sleep. These are the key ingredient in preventing an overtired baby at the end of the day!

If a nap is too early there will be insufficient sleep pressure to send your child to sleep – it may take them longer to settle, and they may have a shorter nap – leading to being overtired at bedtime. An overtired child is 10 x harder to settle at bedtime than one who has had the right naps during the day!

If a nap is too late sleep pressure may be too high, your child will fall asleep immediately, and they may have an extended nap which means at bedtime they haven't built up enough sleep pressure for nighttime sleep and they're difficult to settle.

The nap routine

Babies love consistency and routine. It helps them to understand what is expected of them and signifies what's coming next in their day.

Having a nap routine can be helpful to get babies to sleep. It doesn't need to be long and drawn out, but putting on a clean nappy, drawing the blackout blinds, starting the white noise and a 'sleep well' is all it takes for your baby to know the score. Some people like to add in a quick story or a lullaby. However you decide to do it, make sure it's consistent and you do the same thing every time.

How do I know when my baby needs a nap?

Some babies show sleep cues when they're tired and ready for a nap. The most common of these are:

- Yawning
- Rubbing eyes
- Vacant staring
- Quieting
- Pulling ears
- Fussiness/hyperactivity

Sleep cues can be different from baby to baby, and some don't show any until they are overtired – at which point it's difficult to get them to sleep! An overtired baby gets a surge of cortisol which is often misleading for parents as they appear "full of beans" and not at all ready for a nap.

For this reason, along with your baby's sleep cues, we recommend following **age-appropriate wake windows**. These are the average lengths of time that your baby can be awake in between periods of sleep.

Every baby is different so don't be alarmed if your little one doesn't follow the average wake windows or nap schedules exactly but let's take a look at some averages:

0-6 weeks

Total amount of sleep in 24 hours – 14-17 hours

Average wake window – 45 mins – 1 hour

4-8 naps a day

Average length of naps – 15 mins – 4 hours

6 weeks – 3 months

Total amount of sleep in 24 hours – 14-17 hours

Average wake window – 1 hour - 1hr 45 mins

3-5 naps a day

Average length of naps – 30 mins – 2 hours

Newborn sleep is both unpredictable and unique. We don't recommend trying to shoehorn your baby into a routine at this age. Your baby is still adjusting to life outside of the womb – a period often referred to as the Fourth Trimester.

Your baby will need to feed frequently to keep their little tummy full – when they are hungry will dictate when they wake.

If you're keen to have a little more structure to your day, it can be helpful to follow a EPS routine – that is Eat, Play, Sleep. This can be helpful to make sure your baby is feeding when they're at their most alert and therefore taking a full feed. Babies who "snack" all day long are likely to have shorter bursts of sleep than those who have a good feed when they are alert and go to sleep with a full tummy. This can also help to prevent associations with feeding to sleep further along the line. HOWEVER, you shouldn't worry about routine too much at this stage and the most important thing is that when your baby is hungry, they are fed.

3-4 months

Total amount of sleep in 24 hours – 12-15 hours

Average wake window – 1 hour 30 mins – 1 hour 45 mins

3-4 naps a day

Average length of naps – 30 mins – 2 hours

This is a key stage in your baby's sleep development! Here's a bit of sleep science that can be helpful to know:

The Circadian Rhythm is the 24-hour internal clock in our brain that regulates cycles of alertness and sleepiness. There are two hormones that impact your baby's sleep and support these changing rhythms – melatonin (the sleep hormone) and cortisol (the stress and alertness hormone). At 3 months old your baby's day-night rhythms have been established and you will start to see some changes in the way they sleep:

Somewhere between 4 and 6 months you may notice a change in your baby's sleep – this is often referred to as the dreaded **4-6-month sleep regression**.

Don't panic! We prefer to think of it as a progression rather than a regression. It's a period when your baby's sleep is actually maturing, and their sleep patterns are becoming more like adults'. At the same time, they're mastering many new skills and becoming more active.

The good news is that this progression is absolutely normal and shows that your baby's development is on track.

Your baby's sleep cycles will begin to change to become more like an adult's. This means that they'll cycle through more stages of sleep and spend more time in lighter stages now. Unlike a newborn who spends more time in deep sleep and can pretty much sleep anywhere, your baby will now be at risk of being disturbed when in lighter sleep.



You'll also find that your baby's body clock will mature towards a bedtime between 6pm and 7pm and a wake time between 6am and 7am. This is the start of the 12-hour day and 12-hour night that really helps you to stick to a consistent routine.

So how can you survive this?

Optimise your baby's sleep

environment – we've said it earlier, but blackout blinds, white noise and the right room temperature are all really important.

Be consistent with your bedtime and naptime routines

– these are helpful to signify to your baby that it's time for sleep and what is expected of them next.

Put your baby down drowsy but awake – it's important to help your baby learn to fall asleep independently, and a skill they will really benefit from having.

Implement a routine and stick to it – appropriate wake windows, nap lengths, and sticking to the same consistent 12-hour days/nights all help.

Give your baby a chance to settle themselves at night – don't intervene at every little noise. Babies are very noisy sleepers, and they might just be transitioning between sleep cycles. The last thing you want to do is interfere and wake them!

5-6 months

Total amount of sleep in 24 hours – 12-15 hours
Average wake window – 1 hours 45 mins – 2 hours
3-4 naps a day
Average length of naps – 30 mins – 2 hours

Most babies of this age need 3-4 naps a day. The first two naps should be longer, and the last one or two shorter. We often refer to these later naps as short catnaps, designed to help your baby “get through” to bedtime.

At this age it’s a good idea to aim for those two longer naps at home in the cot and get out and about for the shorter naps – perhaps in the pram or car.

7-9 months

Total amount of sleep in 24 hours – 12-15 hours
Average wake window – 2 hours 15 mins – 2 hours 45 mins
2-3 naps a day
Average length of naps – 1 – 3 hours

Sleep is often more predictable at this stage of your baby's life and you may find the routine is falling into place. At some time in this period your baby will drop their 3rd nap and move to a 2-nap day.

Signs that it might be time to drop that 3rd nap are:

Difficulty settling for naps

Shorter catnaps where these were previously longer

The last nap of the day getting close to bedtime

Early waking

To drop that 3rd nap increase the wake window for your baby by small increments of 15 minutes at a time until they're at the top end of the range. If your baby struggles initially bring bedtime forward to compensate.

A sample routine at this age could be:

- 🕒 7am – Wake and feed
- 🕒 8am – Breakfast
- 🕒 9.30am – Nap 1
- 🕒 11.00am – Wake
- 🕒 12.00pm – Lunch
- 🕒 1.45pm – Nap 2
- 🕒 3.45pm – Wake
- 🕒 4.30pm – Dinner
- 🕒 6.15pm – Bathtime
- 🕒 7.00pm – Bed

10 -12 months

Total amount of sleep in 24 hours – 12-15 hours
Average wake window – 3 hours – 3 hours 30 mins
2 naps a day
Average length of naps – 1 – 2 hours

At this age your baby should be having 2 naps a day. We recommend that these naps are taking place in the cot as often as possible, as these are the most restorative naps.

It's also important that the bulk of your baby's sleep is taking place in the day. You're aiming for 11-12 hours of overnight sleep. Some babies can start to wake early and "make up" for this lost nighttime sleep by having an early, extended morning nap. If this is happening, we want to "cap" that morning nap to ensure they are getting a nice long restorative afternoon nap and are easy to settle at bedtime too. You'll probably find that your baby can go for a longer wake window towards the end of the day now too.

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- 🕒 8am – Breakfast
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- 🕒 11.30pm – Lunch
- 🕒 2.00pm – Nap 2
- 🕒 3.30pm – Wake
- 🕒 5.00pm – Dinner
- 🕒 6.15pm – Bathtime
- 🕒 7.00pm – Bed

12 -18 months

Total amount of sleep in 24 hours – 11-14 hours

Average wake window – 3 hours 30 mins – 4 hours on 2 naps

4-6 hours on 1 nap

1 -2 naps a day

Average length of naps – 1 – 3 hours

At this stage many babies start to show signs of the nap transition from 2 naps to 1 nap.

This transition can be fast and easy for some babies, and can take longer and be more disruptive for others.

Because this varies from baby to baby, here are some of the key things to look out for that may signal your little one is ready to transition:

- **Early waking**
- **Refusing the morning nap**
- **Refusing the lunchtime nap**

The wake window is going to change more than at any other time in your baby's sleep transitions. You run the risk of your baby being overtired if they're not ready – which leads to their body working really hard to keep them awake. When that happens your baby gets a surge of cortisol – which makes it harder for them to fall asleep and stay asleep. Cue the dreaded night waking!

You may need to tweak naps by 15-30 minutes over the course of a few days or weeks until you get it right, or your baby may be able to adjust to a longer wake window quickly and easily. It varies so much – being aware of how long your baby is capable of staying awake for and looking out for those sleepy signals, will help to get your little one into a good nap schedule.

18 months plus

Total amount of sleep in 24 hours – 11-14 hours

Average wake window – 5 – 6 hours

1 nap a day

Average length of naps – 1 – 2 hours

From 18 months onwards your little one will be having one long lunchtime nap, typically lasting 1.5-2 hours.

At the age of 2.5 to 3 years however, they will want to drop that nap entirely and stay awake for 12 hours between wake up and bedtime.

Your child will normally signal that it's time to drop their nap by being unsettled at bedtime.

As a first step, before dropping it entirely, we recommend reducing the length of the daytime nap. You could cap the nap to 1.5 hours or 1 hour as a starting point. If this doesn't work, or they are already on a shorter lunchtime nap, you can transition to a no nap day.

If your baby struggles without a nap initially don't be afraid to move bedtime earlier.

It's also useful to have some quieter time in the day, at their old nap time, for your child to rest and to stop them from being overstimulated and upset in the afternoon. Some quiet play with puzzles or books is ideal.

Good Luck!

We really hope this nap guide has given you the confidence you need to navigate your little one's naps as they grow!

Good luck – you know where we are if you need us!