

Rock-a-bye BABY

A WELL-RESTED BABY MAKES FOR A HAPPY BABY. Louise Pyne SHARES HER GUIDE TO BEATING THOSE SLEEP SETBACKS

Making sure your child gets enough sleep is paramount for their development, but as any new parent can vouch, getting them to drop off like clockwork is no easy task. Dealing with issues that might be preventing your newborn from catching enough zzzs while in the throes of bleary-eyed sleeplessness yourself can take its toll on your emotions and energy levels, but on the flip side, prioritising your little one's sleep from day one can offer big rewards for both you and your bubba.

"Sleep is essential for your baby's cognitive development, immune system and general growth, and fortunately there are many ways you can help to ensure they get enough rest," adds The Baby Show's sleep expert, Chireal Shallow. So, here are the secrets to making sure your baby drifts off soundly.

READ THE SIGNS

During the first three months, your baby's sleep pattern will be erratic, but as you get to know them, you'll notice they give you clues to their tiredness. Along with obvious clues like yawning and eye rubbing, you may notice changes in their behaviour. "They may

be more irritable than normal or restless and cry more than usual," says Chireal. Don't miss the window of opportunity to put them down for a nap as soon as you sense drowsiness, and use the time to relax yourself so you feel refreshed for the rest of the day's activities.

BALANCE BABY'S SLEEP-AWAKE SYSTEM

At around three months you can start to set up an evening sleep routine with your child by following the same pre-bedtime routine. This could involve bath time, followed by baby massage, reading a picture book together with the lights dimmed and lots of cuddles to release the stress-busting hormone oxytocin. "Your baby's body rhythm matures at nine months so between three-to-nine months their sleep may still fluctuate. Try not to get frustrated and just remember this is totally normal. They will find their natural rhythm when they are ready," explains Chireal.

ENJOY THE SUNSHINE

Take your baby out for a walk in their pram every day so they have plenty of exposure to natural sunlight. This will reinforce the difference between rise-and-shine time and

when to hit the sack – naturally helping to regulate their internal body clock. Sleeping in a darkened room at night will also help to boost levels of the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin. "Use a balanced combination of blackout blinds and low lighting to ensure your child drifts off happily," advises Chireal.

DREAM FEED YOUR BABY

Waking your baby up for a feed when they are asleep might sound counter-intuitive but it's thought that having a full tummy will help them sleep for a longer stretch at night. At

around 11pm give them a bottle or nurse them – without making eye contact. Introduce this as soon as possible. "You can drop the feed when your baby is old enough without the worry that they will wake up," adds Chireal.

MAKE THEM FEEL SAFE

Providing a cosy, secure environment that will encourage daytime naps will also help your child to sleep better at night. "Turn on white

noise, leave a picture of you in the room, and a blanket smelling of your natural scent. This will allow your child to feel safe and to focus on these things," shares Chireal. Reducing the space they sleep in will also help them feel more secure, so try swaddling them so they feel snug and cosy.

REGULATE THE TEMPERATURE

Babies wake in the night when they're too hot

or too cool so adding or removing layers when necessary is key to making sure they are not too sticky or cold. Make sure your baby sleeps away from radiators or windows in the room, and use a temperature gauge to regulate the coolness. "The optimal temperature is 20°C," says Chireal.

And with all this advice your baby will be enjoying a happier, healthier slumber in no time at all. **11**

Babies are born with an undeveloped biological clock that takes months to mature

