

Caring for your baby at night

A guide for parents



The
Baby Friendly Initiative
For all babies

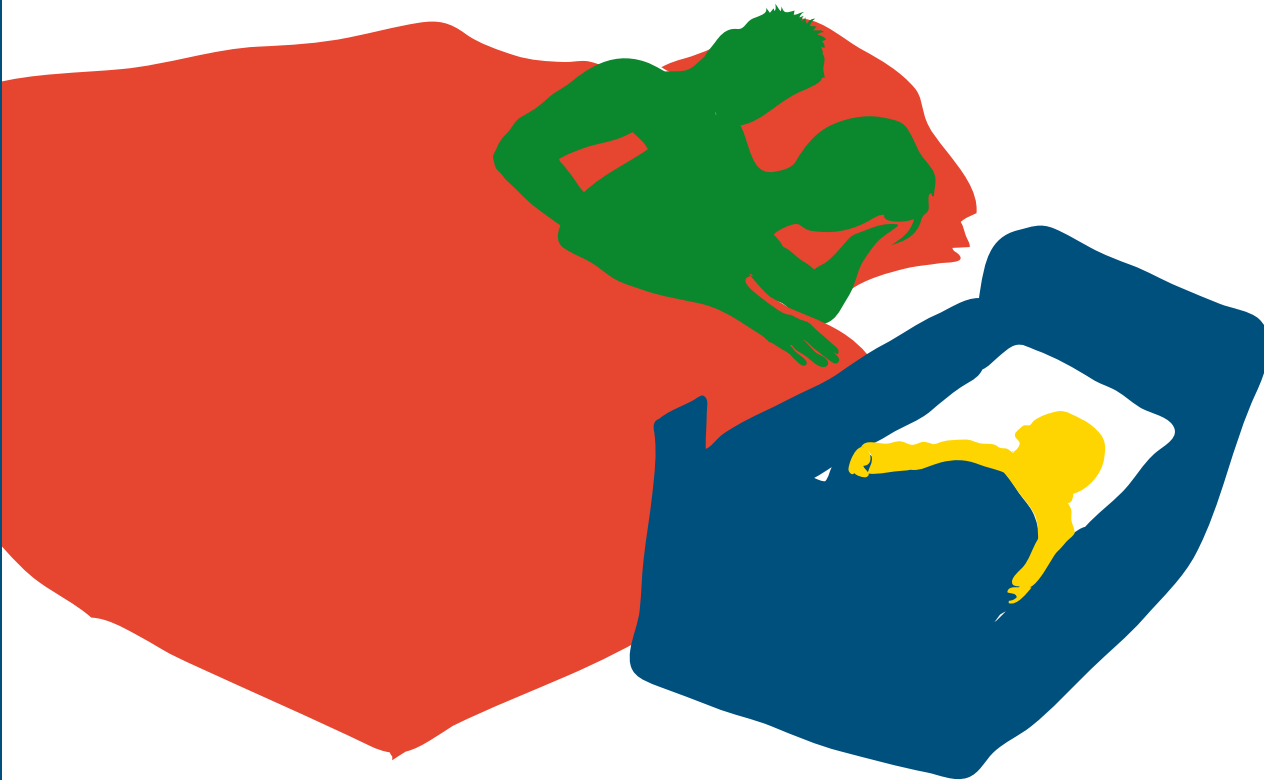
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Caring for your baby at night



Becoming a parent is a very special time and can be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life as you get to know your new baby and learn how to care for her needs. However, it can also be challenging, especially when you are tired and your baby is wakeful and wanting to feed frequently during the night.

It may be reassuring to know that it is not only normal but essential for your baby to feed during the night. Babies grow quickly in the early weeks and months of life and they have very small stomachs. They therefore need to feed around the clock to meet their needs.

Whilst it can be frustrating when your sleep is disturbed during the night, it can also be a lovely quiet time to be with your baby away from the bustle and distractions of daytime. Babies rely on the security and comfort of being close to their parents and need this during the night as well as during the day.



A green silhouette of a person is sitting on the floor, holding a baby in a cot. The cot is blue and yellow, and the person is holding it from behind. A lamp is visible in the background.

Getting some rest

It's important to make sure you create the right environment for getting as much rest as possible.

Keep the room fairly dark – switching on the light wakes everyone up and is not usually needed when you are feeding and comforting your baby.

Keep your baby close. **The safest place for your baby to sleep is in a cot by the side of your bed.** This means you can hear your baby and respond to her needs before she starts crying or becoming distressed, you can reach her easily without having to get up.

LISTEN FOR THESE EARLY FEEDING CUES:

- Sucking fingers
- Restlessness
- Murmuring sounds

Try not to stimulate your baby too much. As soon as she starts waking, offer her a feed, that way she doesn't get too upset and difficult to settle. Talk to her only in a soft, quiet voice and avoid changing her nappy or clothing unless really necessary.

Breastfeeding

Many women choose to feed their baby whilst lying in bed. Ask your midwife or health visitor to help you find a safe and comfortable position and also see the safety information on page 6.

Bottle feeding

It is important to be organised in order to reduce disturbance when bottle-feeding at night. Powdered milk is not sterile and can cause infections if made up in advance. Therefore you will need to make up feeds during the night. However, you can make this easier by having bottles and teats ready sterilised, the powder measured out and boiled water kept in a flask. You may also choose to use ready-to-feed milk.

**ASK YOUR MIDWIFE OR HEALTH VISITOR
FOR INFORMATION ON HOW TO MAKE UP
BOTTLE FEEDS SAFELY**

Never force your baby to take more than she needs in the hope that she will 'go for longer' as this can cause her to become colicky and distressed and may result in her becoming overweight in the long term. Don't add cereal or any other substance to feeds as this is dangerous for your baby. Always follow manufacturer's guidelines with regard to amounts.

PARTNERS, IT WOULD BE GREAT IF YOU...

- Make sure your breastfeeding partner is comfortable
- Pass her things, rather than her having to reach for them
- Bring her drinks and snacks and see she has a glass of water at hand as breastfeeding can be thirsty work
- Give plenty of support – breastfeeding is important for your baby's and your partner's health



When babies don't settle

There may be times when your baby remains unsettled after feeds. Placing your baby in skin-to-skin contact with you and gently rocking can provide comfort. Your partner can help with this too.

If you are breastfeeding you can offer your breast again even if your baby has just fed. Babies find the suckling comforting and there is no risk of overfeeding a breastfed baby.

If you have had a particularly disturbed night, try to take time out to rest during the daytime. Visitors can wait – or help by taking over chores or looking after other children while you and your baby catch up on sleep.

If your baby is crying for long periods she may be ill and require a medical check.

WARNING

- Do not sleep with your baby when you have been drinking any alcohol or taking drugs that may cause drowsiness (legal or illegal)
- Do not sleep with your baby if you or anyone else is a smoker
- Do not put yourself in the position where you could doze off with your baby on a sofa or armchair

Putting your baby down to sleep

To keep your baby safe and to reduce the risk of sudden infant death (sometimes called cot death) always make sure:

- You put the baby down on their back to sleep, never on the front or side
- The cot is beside the parents' bed for at least the first six months
- The mattress is firm and flat – waterbeds, bean bags and sagging mattresses are not suitable
- Your baby is not overdressed or covered with too much bedding (no more than you would use yourself)
- The bedding must not be able to cover the baby's head
- The room is not too hot (16-20°C is ideal)
- The room in which the baby sleeps is a smoke-free zone



BED-SHARING

Some parents choose to sleep with their baby in bed and some fall asleep with their baby during the night while feeding and comforting whether they intend to or not. Therefore it is very important to consider the following points.

If you decide to share a bed with your baby:

- Keep your baby away from the pillows
- Make sure your baby cannot fall out of bed or become trapped between the mattress and wall
- Make sure the bedclothes cannot cover your baby's face or head
- Don't leave your baby alone in the bed, as even very young babies can wriggle into a dangerous position
- It is not safe to bed-share in the early months if your baby was born very small or pre-term

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UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

UNICEF works with families, communities and governments in more than 190 countries to help every child reach his or her full potential.

UNICEF UK's Baby Friendly Initiative works with hospitals, community-health care settings and universities to help them ensure that pregnant women and new mothers get the support they need to breastfeed successfully.

CONTACT US ☎ **0844 801 2414** ✉ **bfi@unicef.org.uk** Learn more at www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly

The Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA)

The CPHVA is the UK's leading professional organisation for health visitors, school nurses, nursery nurses and other community nurses working in primary care. The CPHVA is a professional organisation within the Unite trade union. CPHVA represent the professional interests of practitioners throughout the United Kingdom ensuring that the community practitioner remains a valued – and distinct – entity in the care of families and communities.

✉ unitetheunion.org/cphva

The Lullaby Trust

The Lullaby Trust provides expert advice on safer sleep for babies, supports bereaved families and raises awareness on sudden infant death.

For more information about SIDS and risks, visit ✉ www.lullabytrust.org.uk or call **free** ☎ **0808 802 6869**.

For bereavement support please call our **free helpline** ☎ **0808 802 6868**.

The Royal College of Midwives (RCM)

The RCM is the UK's only trade union and professional organisation led by midwives for midwives. The RCM promotes midwifery, quality maternity services and professional standards. It supports and represents its members individually and collectively in all four UK countries. The RCM influences on behalf of its members and for the interests of the women and families for which they care.

✉ www.rcm.org.uk

Download the health professionals guide to this leaflet at ✉ www.unicef.org.uk/caringatnight



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