



BED TIME FACTS

The importance of a bedtime routine is largely discussed in infants/babies books and advised by sleep specialists, health visitors and pediatricians. It has definitely become a 'must have' activity in your baby's day, and rightly so!

The advantages of putting in place a bedtime routine for babies from a very early age is to help them adapt to natural cycles of day (fresh air and sunlight) and night. It can take several months before babies become fully adapted to the 24 hour clock but you can definitely help influence your baby's sleep patterns right after birth.

Your baby's bedtime routine should include a repetitive set of steps that cue your baby's brain and body that time to sleep is approaching. **The lead up time to sleep is really important!**

The bedtime routine should take no longer than 30-40 minutes (including the feed) and all the steps must be done in the exact same order and place every night, trust me, your baby will quickly learn to associate the pleasant and soothing bedtime routine with falling asleep.

If your baby is breastfed exclusively, you will be pleased to hear that melatonin (the 'sleepy hormone') is present in breastmilk with high levels at night and undetectable levels during the day, so make sure you do not express milk during the day for the bedtime feed. The melatonin cycles in the mother's breast milk help to reinforce normal night/day cycles and may even help to synchronize the infant's sleep patterns to those of his parents.

Now that you have learned why it's important to have a bedtime routine in place, let's discuss the elements you need to include in your baby's bedtime routine:

BATH-TIME (more than a splash-time)

Having a bath is a great cue to mark the transition between day and night for two fundamental reasons:

1. It is a completely different (and highly enjoyable) activity to any other activity during the day (your baby will sense that he only has a bath before night sleep and at no other time).
2. In nature, as night approaches there is a gradual decline in body temperature, which promotes sleep onset by secreting melatonin, the 'sleepy hormone'. When your baby comes out of his warm bath and into the room's cooler temperature this signals the body temperature to drop, imitating what happens in nature and hence cueing your body to feel sleepy. This is particularly important as the seasons change and the sunset arrives later in the months of spring and summer.



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A SOOTHING ENVIRONMENT TO INDUCE SLEEP

After the bath (no longer than 5-8 minutes) take your baby to his nursery room and dim the lights, again imitating what is taking place in nature where after sunset the light intensity is lower. Keep activities and voice to a smooth level, your baby will pick up on this and understand his wind-down process has began. Do not take you baby back to the living room where all the toys and bright lights will excite him and thus become overtired. If your baby becomes overtired or restless entering sleep will be more challenging!

To continue your bedtime routine you can include things like:

- ★ soothing music on the background
- ★ a gentle massage
- ★ pyjamas
- ★ reading a book (nothing excitable),
- ★ saying 'goodnight' to objects around the room
- ★ closing the curtains
- ★ putting a sleeping bag

Conclude your bedtime with a feed (breast or formula milk) so that your baby goes to sleep on a full belly.

Make sure you wind your baby properly so there is no trapped wind that can cause him any discomfort when he is laying on his bed.

AT WHAT TIME SHOULD BEDTIME BEGIN?

One of the most common myths regarding baby sleep is to 'keep a baby up for longer so he will sleep more at night'. Having a consistent and predictable step-by-step winding-down routine is a key component of your baby's day, but it is equally important to make sure your baby does not go to bed overtired, as this will have an impact on his mood, bedtime feed and night sleep quality and consolidation.

Some parents make the mistake of putting their baby down to sleep exactly at 7:00pm. For a few months this may work, but when naps become irregular or your baby stops taking a third or second nap parents should learn to identify that bedtime needs to start at an earlier hour.

The key to choosing the right bedtime is dependent on your baby's age and the time the last nap ended.



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You have probably noticed that during the day your baby is able to remain contently awake for a certain amount of time, then he will begin to tire and will need to take a restful nap. The amount of time your baby can stay contently awake is called the 'awake window' and this varies depending on the baby's age. If your baby becomes overtired before bedtime, his body's natural response is to fight the fatigue by releasing cortisol, a 'stress hormone'. Entering sleep at bedtime and soothing himself to sleep will become a very challenging process if he has become overtired, so make sure your baby does not exceed his 'awake window' between his last nap and bedtime.

The table below shows the age appropriate 'awake window' for your baby and it will help you to establish a nap schedule for daytime sleep and to calculate the appropriate time to put your baby down for bedtime.

BABY AGE	Awake Window
2 weeks	45 minutes
1 month	1 hour
2 months	1 hours 15 minutes
3 months	1 hours 30 minutes
4 months	1 hours 45 minutes
5 months	2 hours
6 months	2 hours 15 minutes
7 months	2 hours 30 minutes
8 months	2 hours 45 minutes
9 months	3 hours
10 months	3 hours 15 minutes
11 months	3 hours 30 minutes
12 months	3,75 hours - 4 hours

I hope you found this report informative and motivates you get started and implement a fun and relaxing bedtime routine for your child. The best way to end your day is putting your little one down and watching him peacefully drift away into sleep.



VANESSA RAMIREZ

Baby and Child Sleep Consultant

M: +44 (0) 7889722208

E: vanessa@lulla-time.com

W: www.lulla-time.com

