Helping babies sleep through the night

Posted by Mary M. Gottesman/Ohio State University
October 22, 2008 02:46AM

At birth, newborns have no clear sense of day and night. They wake as often as every hour to eat because their tummies hold very little, only ½ to 1 ounce of breast milk or formula.

By two months, most healthy term babies no longer require night feedings and learn to sleep for five- and six-hour stretches.

However, many infants and children have a return to night waking throughout the first four and five years of life, most often during periods of large changes in development, such as months of age.

At 9 months of age, babies learn that objects and people do not go away even when they can't be seen. When waking up during the night, the babies of responsive parents know that crying will bring a parent and possibly the opportunity to play and practice the many new skills learned at this age.

Fortunately, this won't last forever, and there are many good tactics to discourage this behavior. You can learn more at FamilyEducation.com or the American Academy of Pediatrics.

But to help your baby learn to sleep through the night, try these research-tested strategies:

• Let your baby learn to fall asleep alone. Babies need to learn to fall asleep on their own, without outside help. Avoid feeding or rocking your baby to sleep. Instead, put your baby to bed awake or drowsy. This allows your baby the chance to fall asleep unassisted.

• Stick to it. It may take seven to 14 days for your baby to learn how to fall asleep alone after 2 months of age, when night feedings are no longer needed. By sticking to a pre-sleep routine, a regular bedtime, and a low level of response to fussing, your baby will learn to sleep at night.

Tags: Mary M. Gottesman, newborn sleeping, Ohio State University, sleep

http://blog.cleveland.com/health/2008/10/helping_babies_sleep_through_t.html