



Sleep, Not Stimulation

A New View

Who doesn't love a sleeping baby? The sight of a baby, swaddled in a soft blanket, cheeks slightly flushed with sleep, touches us deeply.

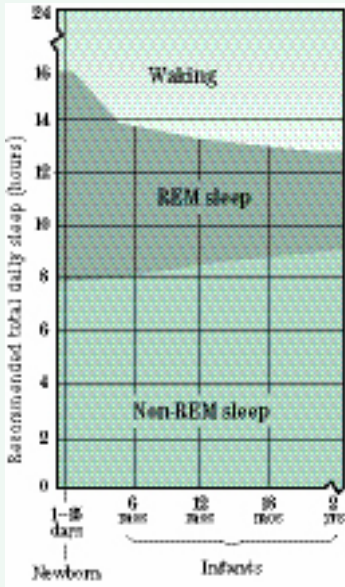
The baby's complete surrender to sleep reminds us of human vulnerability and tenderness. Our innermost desires to nurture and provide are aroused. In the presence of such innocence, we feel both humbled and strengthened by our duty as adult protectors.

As individuals, we appreciate a baby's sleep, but as a culture, we're having trouble getting our babies to sleep well. Sleep difficulties in children are at an all-time high. My experience with new parents strongly suggests widespread, chronic sleep deprivation in babies. Parents who come to my classes describe babies who sleep only twelve or even ten hours a day (far short of the recommended time, which is around sixteen

or more hours daily for newborns; see chart below and on page 12. Other parents have babies who spend hours sobbing in their arms before finally nodding off for a short, restless nap. I see babies rubbing their eyes on their mothers' shoulders—even rubbing their eyes on the carpet if they're lying on the floor—while the exhausted parent shakes a brightly colored toy in front of the child and explains, "My baby never seems sleepy!" Many of these parents are unaware that their children are sleep deprived.

In 2005, the National Sleep Foundation (NSF) commissioned a nationwide survey of the sleep habits and behaviors of children younger than four years old. Sleep needs vary across the first year, but according to the NSF's

Baby's Sleep Distribution*



pediatric task force, most babies past the newborn stage need somewhere between thirteen and fifteen hours of sleep in a 24-hour period. And that's just a minimum. Some babies thrive on sixteen hours per day, or even more. But according to the NSF study, about half of the nation's babies log only twelve hours or fewer daily. That's a serious problem: A six-month-old baby who sleeps twelve hours a day will suffer a cumulative sleep loss of hundreds of hours by the end of his first year of life! The study also showed that although parents wish their kids could get more sleep, these parents don't realize their kids actually need to sleep more.

*For more information, see the chart on page 12.

A Sleep-Deprived Generation

Why are our babies missing out on so much sleep? Do parents want to deprive their children of a basic biological need?

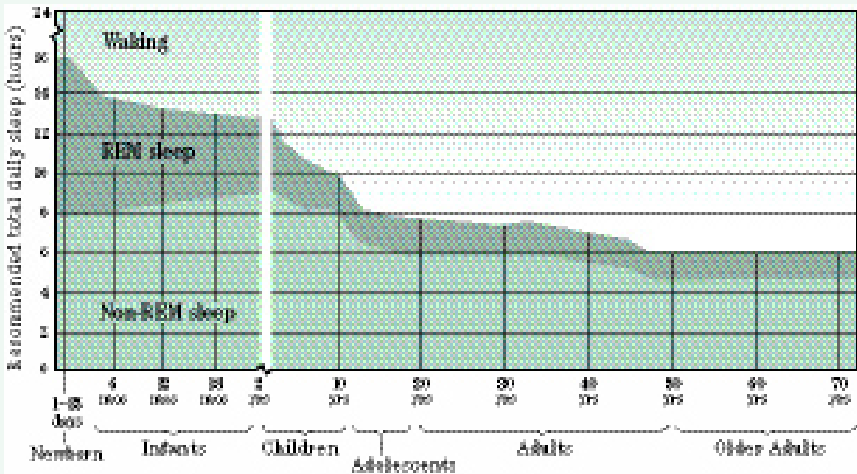
Of course not. Like the generations of parents before us, we want to give our babies everything they need and then some. As expectant parents, we may try even harder than our own parents did to prepare for our new job: We take classes or read books about breastfeeding, child-proofing, infant cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and making baby food at home. Yet there are few opportunities to educate ourselves about an infant's sleep. As a society, we tend to assume sleep will take care of itself—or, at least, that there's little we can do to encourage good sleep in our babies or to prevent sleep problems from starting. There's also a widespread belief that the only way to help a baby sleep is to wait until she is six months old and then let her "cry it out" until she learns to sleep on her own and through the night. Many parents are uncomfortable with this approach, not to mention that the six-month milestone can seem awfully distant when your ten-week-old is taking only a few catnaps a day and wakes every hour at night. In fact, there are several steps—most of them very gentle—you can take to promote good sleep habits. It's great if you can start from birth, but you can also implement these steps anytime in the first year to improve your baby's sleep. That's what this book is all about.

But all the sleep science in the world won't make a difference in your baby's sleep habits unless you are committed to helping your baby get the best sleep possible. My program isn't hard to follow, but if you want good results, you'll have to make your child's sleep a priority. For

starters, you may need to change your own attitudes toward sleep. Unfortunately, mild sleep deprivation is a way of life for many of us; according to a 2002 NSF study, American adults sleep an average of just 6.9 hours nightly. That’s down from nine hours at the beginning at the twentieth century. We are cavalier about our own sleep needs, and some of us may even brag about how little sleep we get at night. In this way, we are poor role models for our children.

Lifetime Sleep Distribution

The recommended sleep averages presented in this chart and the chart on page 10 are intended to help you determine whether your baby needs more sleep than he or she is getting. The figures are culled from the 1966 study cited below, and although they differ slightly from those currently recommended by the National Sleep Foundation, I believe they more accurately reflect the true biological sleep need of babies. The numbers came from observations of actual babies conducted in the mid-1960s, when it was culturally acceptable to let your child nap/sleep as often and as long as necessary.



Roffwarg HP, Muzio JN, Dement WC: Ontogenetic development of the human sleep-dream cycle. Science (1966); 152:604-619