

Understanding Sleeping Problems in Babies and Finding Answers

The one thing that every new parent agrees on is that little sleep after the baby comes home is a real problem.

Not only is sleep deprivation difficult for new parents, it is also hard on the baby. Sometimes, the problem is not serious but in other cases, there could be something else going on that needs to be addressed. As you will learn, experts have conducted years of in-depth research, finding both causes and solutions.

Causes of Newborn Sleep Problems

Remember, anything that prevents a person from getting good sleep is known as sleep deprivation. Babies, especially newborns go through tremendous change in the first year of life so they need a lot of sleep. Typically, babies from birth to around one month of age sleep between 14 and 16 hours a day. Then between six and nine months, the number of hours goes down slightly, usually between 12 and 14 hours. In both scenarios, the majority of the sleep is during the nighttime hours.

Just as the amount of sleep is important the quality of sleep is also important.

A great example of what disrupts sleep is night terrors or nightmares. Adults can understand these but for babies and children, most are terrified and therefore, not able to go back to sleep. Nightmares occur during the Rapid Eye Movement or REM stage of sleep while night terrors are when the person is in deep sleep.

Another common type of sleep deprivation is caused by a condition known as sleep apnea. In this case, the person actually stops breathing while sleeping. Depending on the person, doctors may be able to find an underlying cause but not always. For instance, the cause of sleep apnea could be something simple such as enlarged adenoids, which is called OSA or Obstructive Sleep Apnea. Even though these occurrences do not last long, they still disrupt a person's sleep.

In the situation of a baby not getting adequate sleep, it might have to do with a psychological problem. In most cases, this would be connected with babies of nine months and up to three years, not newborns. Another possibility is called separation anxiety. In this case, the baby is in fear of a parent leaving. As an example, if a baby were left with a babysitter while mom and dad have a date night, the child may never go to sleep until the parents return home.

Options for Treatment

Many times, experts will discover that a person having night terrors or nightmares lives in a home with a lot of stress and tension. However, there are times when the cause of these problems is never identified. For a newborn and small child, you can offer cuddling and closeness, which helps to reassure the child and make him or her more relaxed.

For sleep apnea, if the obstructive is bad, surgery can be performed to correct the problem. A person with this condition would go through a consultation with the surgeon and in most cases an EEG is performed to monitor brain waves. If a baby has sleep apnea, the doctor may recommend using some type of monitor that would alert the parent should the child stop breathing. Most often, a gentle nudge is all it takes along with comforting the child if he or she is scared and the breathing will return to normal.

Although very common, confirming separation anxiety is a little trickier. Some babies simply need more comforting and closeness from a parent so if you feel your child is suffering from this problem, provide special closeness and bonding.

You can also do things to avoid or eliminate sleeping problems. A great example is that never feed a small baby solid food until you know that he or she is truly ready. The truth is, during the first six months of a baby's life, all they need is breast milk or quality formula. Additionally, until the baby reaches three months of age, most doctors recommend that milk or juice not be given too close to bed time. Most people believe that a full stomach will help a baby sleep better but in some cases, it causes upset stomach and leads to a long night of being awake. Instead, cuddle or rock your baby to put him/her to sleep, offer a favorite stuffed animal, or give the baby a pacifier.

Summary of Newborn Sleeping Problems

You need to be patient and understanding, realizing that newborn babies are going to go through difficult sleep phases. Typically, the first year of life will bring many changes so be realistic about expectations. Most children will grow out of sleep problems but of course, if you have any concern, talk to your baby's pediatrician.