

# Sleep and settling for early childhood

## Factsheet 2: Typical sleep behaviour: babies 3–6 months



## Summary

- At this age babies generally sleep 10 – 18 hours in a 24-hour period and need your help to settle and go to sleep.
- Babies at three to six months still need to wake for regular feeding.
- Your baby at three to six months is now sleeping a bit longer, usually in periods that last two to three hours.
- From three to six months your baby might be having three daytime naps, don't worry if they aren't as each baby is different and sleeping patterns can vary a lot.

## Sleeping patterns and behaviours

By around three months of age, babies usually begin smiling and interacting with you.

Some babies start to have longer periods of sleep, and their sleep cycles develop more of a rhythm.

At this age, most babies sleep 10–18 hours in a 24-hour period.

They often sleep in periods that last two to three hours.

Every child is different, so don't worry too much if your child has different sleep patterns to those described here. If you are concerned about your child, contact your local maternal and child health nurse, doctor or the Maternal and Child Health Line on Tel: 13 22 29.

## Sleep rhythms

We all have sleep cycles. These change as we develop and grow.

Babies generally nap three times during the day – but every baby is different and sleeping patterns can vary a lot.

Your baby is growing quickly, and they still need to wake for feeding.

Most babies also need help to settle and go to sleep at this age.

## Settling

You can help your baby learn to self-settle more at night by:

- putting them in their cot when they are tired, but still awake
- recognising and responding to **tired signs**
- using a positive and consistent routine, such as **feed, play, sleep**
- using positive and consistent **bedtime routines**

It is important to create positive sleep associations, for your baby. Some settling approaches may be hard to keep doing for the long term, such as holding your baby until they fall asleep. These can create negative sleep associations for your baby, resulting in them needing to be held to fall asleep. You need to decide what is right for you and your family.

To find out more about each of the things in this list, download 'Factsheet 7: Preventing sleep concerns: babies 0–6 months' from the [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health) <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health>.

## Feeding

Babies aged three to six months still need regular feeding.

Being breastfed or formula fed does not impact on the age at which your baby will sleep through the night.

If your baby is breastfed, giving them baby formula or starting solid food early (breastfeed or formula fed) will not help them sleep better.

Whether they are breastfed or bottle-fed, babies can learn to relate sleep with feeding. Over time, they may become dependent on feeding to fall asleep easily.

To stop your baby from associating feeding with sleeping, when you have finished feeding and playing with them, put them in their cot to fall asleep by themselves when they show signs of tiredness.

If you are worried about your baby's crying or if they are not sleeping or settling you can talk to your maternal and child health nurse, doctor or phone the Maternal and Child Health Line on Tel: 13 22 29.

To receive this form in an accessible format [email Maternal and Child Health and Parenting](mailto:MCH@dhhs.vic.gov.au) <MCH@dhhs.vic.gov.au>.

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Available at the [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health) <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health>.

This factsheet is based on research undertaken by KPMG on behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services. The research included a comprehensive overview of contemporary research and evidence-based approaches and interventions for sleep and settling in early childhood. It considered developmentally appropriate strategies and cultural diversity. Download the full research report from the [MCH Service webpage](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/maternal-child-health) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/maternal-child-health>.