

Perfect night (by about 12 weeks)

The context.

The information from this sheet is given to parents at approximately 8 to 10 weeks of age. The intention is to begin guiding the child in this direction by approximately that age. The planned outcome is, that by about 12 weeks of age, the child is able to sleep approximately 12 hours per night. Please note that, for the large majority of children, there is still one feed occurring through the night. For the majority of children this single feed, known as a rollover feed, occurs at the time of the mother's or sometimes the father's going to bed. In a second group the children do not respond well to the rollover feed and it proves to be more successful for the mother to continue with a feed, which is requested by the child, sometime between approximately 1 and 3 am. Both strategies are successful. The guidelines below relate to my so-called 'Plan A' babies where a rollover feed is delivered by the parents at their bed time.

Before commencing this plan, with your own child, it is essential that you are confident that the child's milk supply and calorie intake is sufficient to meet their needs. Despite the controversy which exists about starting solid food early, it is my personal and professional experience that a large proportion of babies benefit from some supplementary feeding by this age. In particular, babies who are growing strongly, for example boys with tall parents, seem to benefit from commencing some solid feeding by this age. (See starting solids).

The plan.

6 to 6.30 pm.

Final feed completed and down to bed.

During the evening, to the best of your ability, do not attend to the child.

10 pm (**your bedtime**).

Rollover feed.

- The rollover feed is a **“full”** feed
- It is a **delivered** service
- Try to keep the child **sleepy**
- **Enjoy** this time but put the child down when the feed is completed
- Some babies will be deeply asleep. That is OK and just be gently persistent, I recognise that in some children the rollover feed may not work.

1 to 4 am

This feed in the middle of the night is a **“shrinking”** feed.

- Baby calls for this feed.
- Give the smallest volume of milk or the shortest time that will allow the child to return to sleep.
- Aim to delete this feed within a week or two or three. For the majority of children, who are feeding well through the day, this feed can be deleted by about 12 weeks of age.
- Note that for some children, who do not respond favourably to the rollover feed concept, this feed in the middle of the night persists for a few more weeks.

6 to 6.30 am.

The “**first**” day feed.

- Make this a “full” feed. It is often a relatively short and efficient feed e.g. 15 to 20 minutes.
- Put the child down as soon as possible and try to achieve a return to sleep.
- The sleep which follows is often short. While the time varies, it may be between 45 and 90 minutes long. Please note that if the child sleeps for a longer period, for example, two or three hours, that is fine. There is no need to wake the child. Despite this, the sleep is allowed to be short.
- I sometimes refer to this awakening as ‘Type I’ awakening. The essential characteristic of a Type I awakening is a feed and a rapid return to sleep.

7.30 to 8 am.

The second day feed.

- Make this a “full” feed. If solids have been started then they are given here.
- This is followed by the first **Happy Wake Time** of the day. (See below).
- Please note that the HWT, that this age, is short eg 15 – 30 minutes after the feed has finished. If the child is awake and stimulated for too long, they will have an increasing amount of trouble in achieving sleep because of tiredness.
- In my consulting, I refer to this as a ‘Type II’ awakening. The essential characteristic of Type II awakening is a feed, followed by a Happy Wake Time.

During the day, plan to feed at approximately 2.5 – 3 - 4 hrly intervals. It is common for the time between feeds to be slightly shorter in the morning and longer in the afternoon. Patterns of feeding vary greatly, depending upon the mother's milk supply and family responsibilities and activities during the day. In the first three months, babies are relatively intolerant of daytime activities. Despite this, families with multiple children clearly have conflicting responsibilities.

The longest unbroken day sleep should be set at no longer than 4 hours of continuous sleep. If still asleep then the child should be gently lifted, fed and returned to sleep. Long sleeps i.e. 4 hrs plus need to be ‘saved’ for the night.

The Happy Wake Time.

This is a simple but important and powerful concept. As you see above, the night is reasonably time driven. During the hours of daylight, the clock is not the primary reference point for planning a child's sleeping times. The Happy Wake Time is exactly that. The child's feed has been completed and he is then happily, calmly and constructively awake. This is a period of excellent communication and interaction. The key in using the Happy Wake Time is to understand that it has a beginning, a middle and most importantly an end. The ‘beginning of the end’ is marked by changing behaviour. For the youngest of babies e.g. under six weeks of age, the Happy Wake Time is quite short. In these children, it may be as short as 5 to 15 minutes. The common behaviour changes include slightly urgent or jerky body movements, sleepy blinking, the beginning of a tired cry. By approximately 12 weeks of age, children will commonly rub an eye with the back of a wrist. Please note that these signals are important. The window of opportunity for entering the next block of sleep is relatively narrow. For the youngest of children this may be only three to five minutes long. If the child is kept up for a longer period of time, for example an additional 30 or more minutes, they begin to become overtired and the ability to achieve and maintain sleep goes down. Please experiment with the signals which your child gives indicating that they have reached the beginning of the end of the Happy Wake Time. Once you have learned the child signals, you will become expert and confident in returning them to their first and subsequent day sleeps. Once understood, the Happy Wake Time concept will give you good management of day sleeps forever.