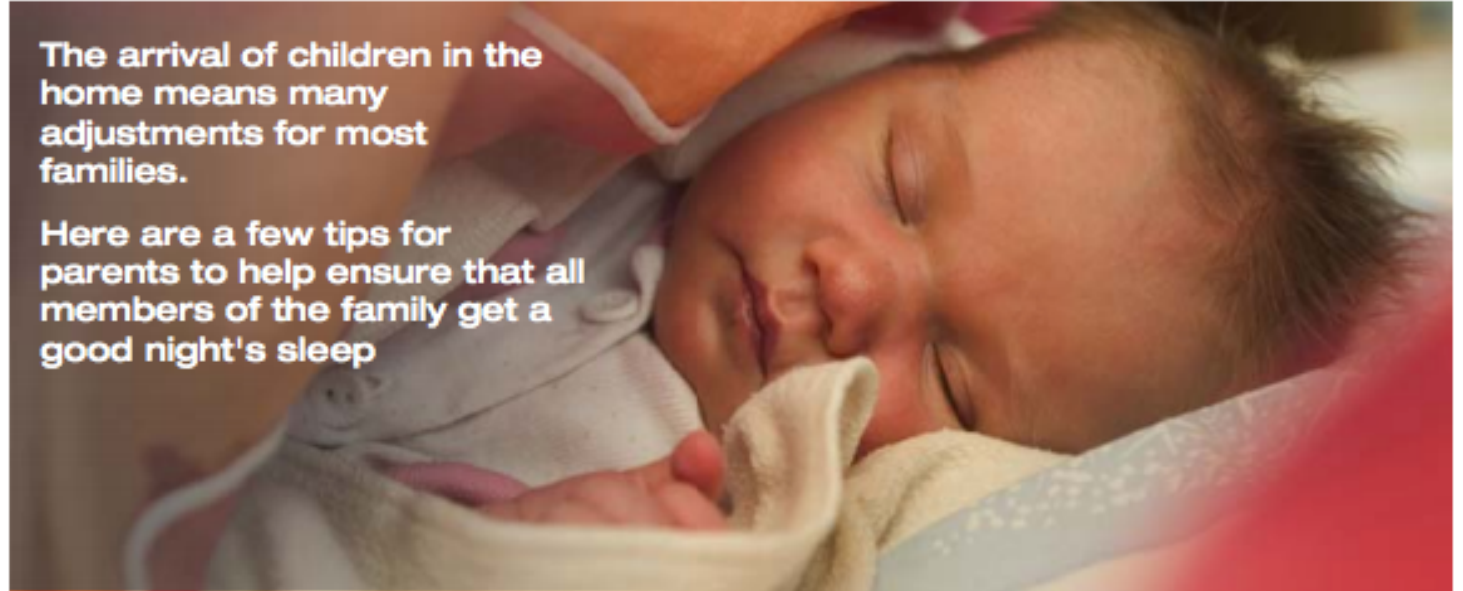


Sleep

Sleep tips for parents

The arrival of children in the home means many adjustments for most families.

Here are a few tips for parents to help ensure that all members of the family get a good night's sleep



Establish a regular bedtime that allows your child enough sleep for their age and which fits in with your working hours (if possible).

Establish positive sleep habits with your child at an early age. Have a set sleep schedule for bedtime and waking. Be consistent and keep the same schedule for weekdays and weekends. Know how much sleep is appropriate for your child's age.

Establish a 20-to-30 minute nightly 'calm-down' bedtime routine, which can include taking a warm bath, warm milky drink, starchy snack and bedtime story. TV at bedtime may interfere with falling asleep. A night-light, favourite toy or dummy/comforter may help young children to settle.

Check your child's diet; some artificial additives in such things as fruit squash, as well as food allergies, seem to cause hyperactivity in some children. Try to avoid artificially flavoured drinks and sweets, and tinned or preserved foods.

Do not just ignore a sleepless child (even if they would let you!); comfort them and settle them back in their own bed, even if you have to do this a number of times. They will soon learn that, while you do not ignore their distress, they will have to accept that they go back to sleep once reassured. Try to get the balance right between responding to every cry and letting the child cry if it is attention seeking – not easy!

Ask yourself these five simple questions:

1. Does your child have problems going to bed or falling asleep?
2. Does your child appear very sleepy or overtired during the day?
3. Does your child wake up frequently during the night or have trouble getting back to sleep?
4. Does your child snore loudly?
5. Does he/she seem to have breathing problems at night?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes', you may find it useful to discuss your child's sleep with your doctor or health adviser

Talk to your doctor or health adviser if either you or your child's sleep disturbance continues.

Tips for parents

Take a nap in the day, especially if you have a toddler who will nap in the afternoon too. Arrange for a relative, friend or babysitter to give you the odd night or day's break, not just for a social life, but to make up on lost sleep.

Share the getting up or staying up with your partner if you can; then you can alternate disturbed nights. Go to bed earlier yourself to give you more time to rest or sleep between disturbances. Even if this disrupts your social life, it is more important for your health to get enough rest.

Look after yourself. Make sure you eat a good diet and take regular exercise, so your own health suffers less. Remember that these difficulties are mostly temporary. With time and patience they can be resolved, or will resolve themselves.