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A good night's rest - how to get your baby to sleep

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By Kate Hilpern

Wednesday May 13 2009

Why getting your baby into a routine can put an end to sleepless nights.

Sleep deprivation can come as a torturous shock to new parents, says sleep specialist [Jo Tantum](#). "It's not that they haven't been warned - just that pregnant mums don't realise the extent to which it can affect every aspect of their lives."

It's no coincidence, she believes, that most mothers who suffer post-natal depression say they suffered from lack of sleep. "If you have a toddler, they don't understand why mummy and daddy are grumpy and have no time for them - which can make them play up. Your relationship with your other half suffers because he has to regularly go into the spare room to get enough sleep to be OK for work. And you start to feel unhealthy and that you can't cope. The dynamics of family life are affected big-time."

Then there's work. Tantum hears from hundreds of women who, having come to the end of their maternity leave, go back to work only to find they can't function. "Particularly in this climate, their bosses are saying: 'You're not working to your usual standard. If you want to keep your job, I suggest you do something about it.' No wonder the mother feels a failure in every respect."

The good news, says Tantum, is expectant mums can prepare in advance so their baby sleeps through the night after just three months. "And those who feel they've missed the boat can still get their baby into good sleeping habits." In fact, this will come as no surprise to many parents, with books by the likes of [Gina Ford](#) and [Tracy Hogg](#) having long topped the baby book market. "The problem is that many mums tell me Gina Ford is too regimented and Tracy Hogg's *The Baby Whisperer* is too wishy-washy. What I suggest lies somewhere in between," says Tantum, who has come up with seven different feeding and sleeping routines.

"All babies are different and all parents' lifestyles are different," she explains, although they all include key elements such as giving your baby a dream feed at 11pm. "Most parents think it is silly or even cruel to wake their baby in the night, but your baby is capable of only one long sleep per 24 hours, so you need it to be when you are having your long sleep at night - not in the daytime."

Also a big part of Tantum's philosophy is encouraging new mums to start a log of night feeding and writing down when your baby wakes for a feed. "It will usually be the same - say 2.46am. When your baby starts to stir and you feed her immediately, she will keep setting her internal alarm clock to wake herself at that time again and again - which is why you often hear of six-, seven- and eight-month-old babies waking for feeds throughout the night."

To get past this, Tantum advises leaving your baby for five minutes to see if she will settle down. "I don't advocate controlled crying. I think that's too harsh. I advise a minute-by-minute method that focuses on listening in between the crying. The quiet gaps in between any crying tell you whether the baby is trying to settle themselves."

Tantum has always been a lover of young children. "I grew up in a cul-de-sac, and instead of playing with my friends, I'd often get their younger brothers and sisters together to read stories and mother them. When my cousin came along when I was 14, I was always wanting to bath her and take her out."

After leaving school, she became a nanny and later a maternity nurse. "I found I was very good at getting babies to sleep through the night. I'd tried out various methods, read all the books, listened to all the old wives' tales and had in essence created my very own technique."

Having published a best-selling book, *Baby Secrets*, these days Tantum devotes herself almost entirely to trouble-shooting - either answering emails or via her "rescue package," which consists of her going into a family for 48 hours to guide parents at their wits' end.

Among the biggest myths that Tantum believes exist about babies and sleep is that babies will find their own routine. "In fact, the advice to demand-feed winds me up no end, because you don't end up listening to what your baby really needs. You just wind up sticking them on the breast if they cry, when in fact that crying might mean the baby's overstimulated or really, really tired."

Jo Tantum is the author of *Baby Secrets* (published by [Michael Joseph](#)) and will be speaking at the Baby Show, at the [NEC, Birmingham](#) from 15-17 May

- Kate Hilpern



Image posed. Photo: Getty Images

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