

Breastfeeding & Night-Time Sleep

a tips-sheet for parents



A Guide To:

Night-Time Nursing For
Mothers of Young
Babies



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www.linked-up.org.uk

Linked-Up: Food for Thought Sheets: Breastfeeding & Night-Time Sleep

It is pretty well-known that young babies will wake fairly regularly through the night during the early months after birth (& for the months following a preterm baby's due date...).

Here are some interesting factual snippets that relate to night-time nursing:

- Studies have shown that breastfeeding mums actually get *more* sleep than mums who are formula-feeding!
- It is thought that this finding may be related to the production of oxytocin (known as 'the hormone of Calm, Love & Healing') in the mother's body during nursing.¹
- While a mum is nursing her baby 'she relaxes physically because her blood pressure drops & the level of the stress hormone, cortisol, decreases.'²
- During night-time nursing, when periods of larger areas of skin-to-skin contact between mum & infant are likely to be more prolonged, oxytocin is produced in the baby's brain due to touch and from the process of suckling. This contributes towards making the baby 'feel good and safe... and lowers stress levels'.²
- Digestion 'is more effective when it is accompanied by skin-to-skin contact'²
(page 123)
- Babies receive melatonin (the sleep-inducing hormone) from their mother's milk (which eventually helps the baby's system to develop his own day/night 'circadian rhythm').
- A good sign that a preterm baby is getting enough milk is having 6 to 8 wet nappies every 24 hours (consisting of pale urine that doesn't have a strong smell)⁴
- A recent study has concluded 'that the unique composition of breast milk has the potential to play an important role in brain and subsequent development'⁵
- The consensus of opinion from research is that:

'Falling asleep with your baby is dangerous if you (or any other person in the bed might find it hard to respond to the baby), eg if you or they: ⁶

* have drunk alcohol * have taken any (legal or illegal) drug which could cause extra sleepiness

* are otherwise unusually tired to a point where you or they would find it difficult to respond to the baby'

...and it may also be safest not to bedshare in the early months if your baby was born preterm or was small at birth, or if he has a high temperature'⁶

References:

1. 'The Oxytocin Factor-Tapping the Hormone of Calm, Love & Healing'. Moberg, Kerstin. Pinter & Martin 2011
2. 'The Hormone of Closeness' Moberg, Kerstin. Pinter & Martin 2013 Page 70
3. “ “ “ “ “ “ “ “ Page 71
4. BLISS.org.uk 'Breastfeeding Q & As' accessed March 2014
5. 'Food for Thought – Breastfeeding & Child Development' IFS Dec 2013.
6. 'Sharing a Bed with Your Baby- a Guide for Breastfeeding Mothers' UNICEF UK Baby-Friendly Initiative 2005

Linked-Up is a small charitable organisation based in South Warwickshire offering practical help for new mothers of preterm (or low-birthweight) babies, mothers who have experienced an emergency Caesarian and mothers who are hoping to carry on nursing their babies at home & out-and-about

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Disclaimer:

We hope you find the 'Linked-Up 'Tips' useful, but please be aware they are intended only as a general guide & source of generic information. Please contact your midwife or health visitor regarding specific issues relating to your own individual situation.