

# What is Preventing Your Baby from Sleeping Through the Night?

by Elizabeth Pantley

Here's something that may really surprise you: As much as we may want our babies to sleep through the night, our own subconscious emotions sometimes hold us back from encouraging change in our babies' sleeping habits. You yourself may be the very obstacle preventing a change in a routine that disrupts your life. So let's figure out if anything is standing in *your* way.

## **Examine Your Own Needs and Goals**

Today's society leads us to believe that "normal babies" sleep through the night from about two months; my research indicates that this is more the exception than the rule. The number of families in your boat could fill a fleet of cruise ships.

*"At our last day-care parent meeting, one father brought up the fact that his two-year-old daughter wasn't sleeping through the night. I discovered that out of 24 toddlers only six stayed asleep all night long." ...Robin, mother of thirteen-month-old Alicia*

You must figure out where your own problem lies. Is it in your baby's routine, in your management of it, or simply in the minds of others? If you can honestly say you want to change your baby's sleep habits because they are truly disruptive to you and your family, then you're ready to make changes. But if you feel coerced into changing Baby's patterns because Great Grandma Beulah or your friend from playgroup says that's the way it should be, it's time for a long, hard think.

Certainly, if your little one is waking you up every hour or two, you don't have to think long on the question, "Is this disruptive to me?" It obviously is. However, if your baby is waking up only once or twice a night, it's important that you determine exactly how much this pattern is disturbing to you, and decide on a realistic goal. Be honest in assessing the situation's effect on your life. Begin today by contemplating these questions:

- Am I content with the way things are, or am I becoming resentful, angry, or frustrated?
- Is my baby's nighttime routine negatively affecting my marriage, job, or relationships with my other children?
- Is my baby happy, healthy, and seemingly well rested?
- Am I happy, healthy, and well rested?

Once you answer these questions, you will have a better understanding of not only what is happening with regard to your baby's sleep, but also how motivated you are to make a change.

## **Reluctance to Let Go of Those Nighttime Moments**

A good, long, honest look into your heart may truly surprise you. You may find you actually *relish* those quiet night wakings when no one else is around. I remember in the middle of one night, I lay nursing Coleton by the light of the moon. The house was perfectly, peacefully quiet. As I gently stroked his downy hair and soft baby skin, I marveled at this tiny being beside me—and the thought hit me, “I love this! I love these silent moments that we share in the night.” It was then that I realized that even though I struggled through my baby’s hourly nighttime wakings, I needed to *want* to make a change in our night waking habits before I would see any changes in his sleeping patterns.

You may need to take a look at your own feelings. And if you find you’re truly ready to make a change, you’ll need to give yourself permission to let go of this stage of your baby’s life and move on to a different phase in your relationship. There will be lots of time to hug, cuddle, and love your little one, but you must truly feel ready to move those moments out of your sleeping time and into the light of day.

## **Worry About Your Baby’s Safety**

We parents worry about our babies, and we should! With every night waking, as we have been tending to our child’s nightly needs, we have also been reassured that our baby is doing fine — every hour or two all night long. We get used to these checks; they provide continual reassurance of Baby’s safety.

*“The first time my baby slept five straight hours, I woke up in a cold sweat. I nearly fell out of bed and ran down the hall. I was so sure that something was horribly wrong. I nearly wept when I found her sleeping peacefully.” ...Azza, mother of seven-month-old Laila*

Co-sleeping parents are not exempt from these fears. Even if you are sleeping right next to your baby, you’ll find that you have become used to checking on her frequently through the night. Even when she’s sleeping longer stretches, *you* aren’t sleeping, because you’re still on security duty.

These are very normal worries, rooted in your natural instincts to protect your baby. Therefore, for you to allow your baby to sleep for longer stretches, you’ll need to find ways to feel confident that your baby is safe—all night long.

Once you reassure yourself that your baby is safe while you sleep, you’ll have taken that first step toward helping her sleep all night.

## **Belief That Things Will Change on Their Own**

You may hope, pray, and wish that one fine night, your baby will magically begin to sleep through the night. Maybe you’re crossing your fingers that he’ll just “outgrow” this stage, and you won’t have to do anything different at all. It’s a very rare night-waking baby who suddenly decides to sleep through the night all on his own. Granted, this may happen to you—but your baby may be two, three or four years old when it does! Decide now whether you have the patience to wait that long, or if you are ready to gently move the process along.

## Too Fatigued to Work Toward Change

Change requires effort, and effort requires energy. In an exhausted state, we may find it easier just to keep things as they are than try something different. In other words, when Baby wakes for the fifth time that night, and I'm desperate for sleep, it's so much easier just to resort to the easiest way to get him back to sleep (rock, nurse, or replace the pacifier) than it is to try something different.

Only a parent who is truly sleep deprived can understand what I'm saying here. Others may calmly advise, "Well if things aren't working for you, just change what you're doing." However, every night waking puts you in that foggy state where the only thing you crave is going back to sleep—plans and ideas seem like too much effort.

If you are to help your baby sleep all night, you *will* have to force yourself to make some changes and follow your plan, even in the middle of the night, even if it's the tenth time your baby has called out for you.

So, after reading this section and you're sure you and your baby are ready, it's time for you to *make a commitment to change*. That is the first important step to helping your baby sleep through the night.

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