



USPHS Wellness Program: Sleep Subcommittee

Reclaiming Rest: Tip Sheet for Postpartum Mothers Sleep deprivation is one of the biggest postpartum challenges but small changes can make a meaningful difference.

- 1 **Adopt Flexible Expectations: Your sleep will be fragmented. Aim for a targeted amount of sleep within a 24-hour period vs a perfect night of sleep.**
- 2 **Sleep When the Baby Sleeps: Even short naps (20–30 minutes) reduce exhaustion.**
 - o Protect a 4–5 Hour Core Sleep Block when possible. Ask a partner, family member, or trusted friend to handle one nighttime feeding (if applicable) and/or take over an early-morning stretch. This uninterrupted block of sleep can significantly improve mood and cognitive function.
- 3 **Lower Mental Load: Prep nights during the day (bottles, pump parts), keep diapers & supplies in simple stations nearby, use white noise for your own sleep too.**
 - o Manage Postpartum Anxiety Around Sleep: Many mothers can't sleep even when they're tired due to worry or hormonal shifts.
 - o Try:
 - Deep breathing (4-7-8 method)
 - Mindfulness or grounding exercises
 - Limiting nighttime phone use
 - Talking to a provider if anxiety disrupts sleep consistently
- 4 **Postpartum Warning Signs (For Mom): (Postpartum is Treatable) Seek help if you experience:**
 - o Inability to sleep even when exhausted
 - o Feeling disconnected from the baby
 - o Persistent sadness or panic
 - o Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby
- 5 **Understanding Newborn Sleep: Newborns sleep in short cycles, though they sleep 14-17 hours total per day, it is in short 2-4 hour cycles.**
 - **What to Expect**
 - o Irregular schedule for the first 6-8 weeks.
 - o Day-night confusion is normal
 - o Light, active sleep (twitching, grunting, eyes moving, etc.)
 - **Helpful Tips**
 - o Follow your baby's cues rather than the clock
 - o Keep nighttime interactions quiet and calm
 - o Start simple routines around 3-4 weeks (dim lights, reduce stimulation, etc)





Reclaiming Rest: Tip Sheet for Postpartum Mothers (continued)

6 Safe Sleep Basics for Babies: Follow the ABC Rule: Alone, Back, Crib

- Do
 - Use a firm, flat sleep surface with a fitted sheet
 - Assure your baby is placed to sleep in their back
 - Keep crib free of blankets, pillows, and toys
 - Share a room for the first 6 months
- Don't
 - Let baby sleep on couches, adults beds, or inclined surfaces
 - Use weighted sleep products

7 Feeding and Sleep: Feeding patters impact sleep, especially in the early weeks.

- If breastfeeding:
 - Expect frequent feeds (8-12 times/day)
 - Cluster feeding in evenings is normal
- If formula feeding:
 - Follow baby's hunger cues; avoid overfeeding
- Tips:
 - Try a "top-off feed" before the longest nighttime stretch
 - Maintain a low stimulation environment during the nighttime feed (dim lights, soft voice)



8 Teaching Baby to Learn Day vs Night: Babies need help regulating their internal clock

- During the day:
 - Expose the baby to natural light and normal household noises
 - Encourage more active play between naps
- At night:
 - Keep lights low
 - Reduce playful tones/talking
 - Only change diapers when wet/soiled



9 Simple, Supportive Strategies for Postpartum Survival:

- Swaddle baby (until they show signs of rolling)
- Use baby wearing for daytime naps to support rest and bonding
- Take shifts with your partner to protect longer stretches of sleep
- Prepare simple, nourishing meals for yourself (prioritize protein and hydration to support mood and healing)
- Ask for and accept help with chores, meals, and errands.



References:

CDC: Safe sleep and infant basics

<https://www.cdc.gov/sudden-infant-death/sleep-safely/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/reproductive-health/features/babies-sleep.html>

NICHD: Safe sleep

<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/sleep>

<https://safetosleep.nichd.nih.gov/>

Office on Women's Health: Breastfeeding

<https://womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding>

<https://womenshealth.gov/mental-health/mental-health-conditions/postpartum-depression>

<https://womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/childbirth-and-beyond/recovering-birth>

AAP: Feeding & newborn sleep

<https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/150/1/e2022057990/188304/Sleep-Related-Infant-Deaths-Updated-2022?autologincheck=redirected>

<https://healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/default.aspx>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/default.aspx>

ACOG: Postpartum mental health

<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/postpartum-depression>