

Upside Dad's Ultimate Newborn Sleep Guide – Four easy steps to get your baby to sleep

I have seen the look of horror in many parent's faces when they go several nights with a few hours or less of sleep. It usually happens in phases. First, one parent burns out and reaches their limit and then the burden lands mostly on the other parent to not only care for the newborn but also the burned-out parent - it's not pretty.



When we get over-tired, we start to make questionable decisions. A feeling of anxiety takes over and we start doing anything and everything we can to stop the baby from crying.

In the midst of desperation, we usually resort to unusual rocking motions, knee bouncing, tapping and rubbing, shushing or a combination of these.

Sometimes it works for a bit, but most times it doesn't take very long until the screaming starts again.

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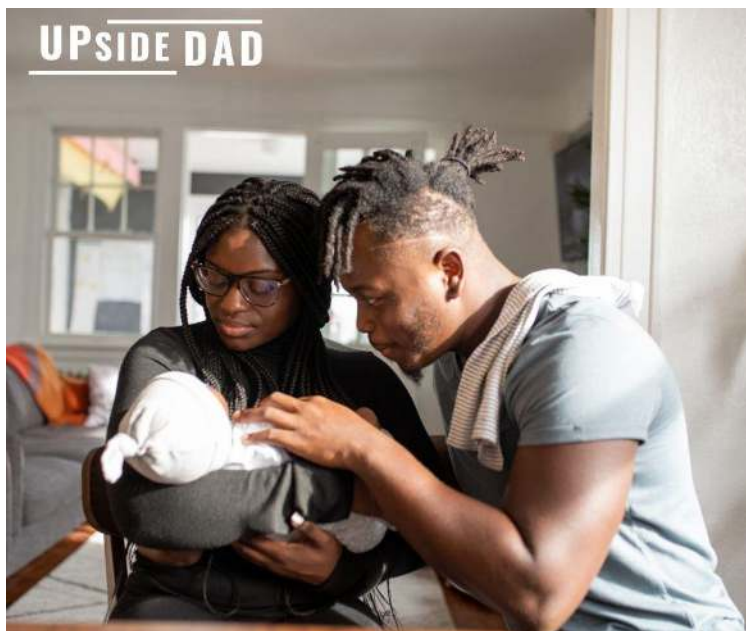
I know the exact feeling way too well and I still get a pit in my stomach when I think about it.

When my wife and I reached our no-sleep limit, we started to research. We read so many blogs but found way too many different opinions. So, we finally decided to splurge and pay for online courses.

Most of the courses we took highlighted the same few points in different ways. They approached newborn sleep in slightly different angles but the theme remained the same. The moral of the story is that there are actual tested ways to guide your newborn to sleep and help them stay there longer.

In this detailed guide, I will walk you through my version of the common points between each of the courses I took. We will go in detail for each step on how to calm your crying newborn baby, how to put them to sleep and most importantly, how to help them stay asleep as long as possible.

Let's get right into it!



Observe Your Baby (Step 0)

This is not technically part of the four steps to getting your baby to sleep but it is crucial for your success in early parenthood.

We love to look at our newborn babies. They are so tiny and cute so we just stare at them endlessly imagining what they will be like as they grow up. What we forget to do most times is to **observe them and look for clues**.

This becomes even more real when we are tired. After a few nights of close to no-sleep it's normal to become absent minded and miss some important signs our baby is giving us.

So, watch everything your baby does with a critical mind.

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This doesn't mean that you shouldn't look at them with googly eyes and get lost in your own thoughts; that's important too. But when I say "watch everything your baby does" I'm referring to carefully analyzing your baby every time she moves or does something new and exciting.

Situations like watching them as they get tired, as they are just falling asleep, when they cry after waking up from a nap, while eating, pooping, etc. Understanding these subtle cues will help you learn your baby and be able to better help her when she needs, and give her what she needs.

The key to your success lies in your ability to distinguish what your baby needs at different times of the day and night.

Imagine a world where your baby is crying and you could almost instantly know if she was hungry, tired, needs a burp or a diaper change just by looking at him. The truth is, it's actually not that difficult to know what your baby needs once you start watching him.

Although there are many reasons that could lead to your baby being upset, you can usually narrow it down to a few or even a couple of options just by eliminating the obvious ones.

Did you just change and feed your baby in the last 30 minutes? Then she is likely not hungry. And if you don't smell a #2 then you can eliminate the diaper as well. P.S. The sniff test rarely fails 😊

Since this guide is about sleep, I want to focus on the **two most common causes for crying: hungry and tired.**



The Two Main Reasons Why Your Baby Cries

Feeding and Sleeping go together like Batman and Robin. They are so closely linked that when one of them goes astray, likely so does the other. Each time your newborn baby cries, there is a very good possibility it is because of one or the other, or both. Avoid "both" by all means!

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You might notice that when she sleeps and naps well, she also eats much better and stays happy and satisfied for longer. It is not a coincidence. The relationship between eating and sleeping is extremely strong during the first few months and the two should always be looked at together.

For the purposes of this guide, we will skip the first 2-4 weeks of the baby's life since during that time the parents should be focusing on establishing good feeding habits for the new baby and ensuring weight gain is steady and on the rise.

Once your baby is feeding well (bottle or breast) and consistently, we can now start looking at how feeds can affect sleep.

Let's take a quick look at a newborn's feeding cycles and how they can affect napping and sleeping.

In the very early days (weeks 1-4) it is likely that you baby will fall asleep while feeding. This is normal. Many parents struggle to keep newborn babies awake long enough to get full feeds which leads to feedings happening much more often. This is also due to the fact they can't take so much food at once given that their stomachs are so tiny when they are just born. As small as an almond in some cases.

Once your newborn is a bit more developed (4+ weeks), you may start noticing that they get drowsy after a feed and may even take a very quick cat nap, but soon wake up.

This is the start of what we like to call the **F.E.D. cycle**.

The F.E.D. cycle is the newborn's natural cycle. Their tiny bodies go through this cycle over and over, day after day.

Here is what it means:

1. **F – FEED ME:** Your baby is hungry! Feed her until she is full or stops eating.

Note: Don't be fooled by the drowsiness that may follow a good, long feed. she is actually not tired yet, especially if she just woke up from a nap.

2. **E – ENTERTAIN ME:** This is now awake time and it is time to entertain your baby so they don't get bored.

Entertainment can be anything from changing a diaper, walking around, laying her on a playmat, doing tummy time, a bath, etc...

3. **D – DOWNTIME:** Your baby will now start showing Sleepy Cues (read further down for more details) and it is time to prepare for downtime, either a nap or nighttime sleep.

At the very beginning of your baby's life, a full FED cycle can vary in length anywhere from 20 minutes to 120 minutes. It is more likely that with a young newborn you are closer to the lower end of this spectrum. For Example:

F = 10 minutes

E = 20 minutes

D = 20 minutes

Rinse and repeat.

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The example above is a 50 minutes cycle, which means you are feeding your baby every hour or so, all day long. That is IF your baby is able to nap at this point. If she is not yet able, don't worry, we will tackle that further in this guide.

With a baby that doesn't nap well, it is also very likely that your nights will be broken up in small chunks similar to your daytime cycle. That sounds tough but it's the reality for too many parents of newborns out there.

There is a better way, and that is why you are here!

Here is a bonus tip to help you improve nap/night sleep length and consistency: **EXTEND the daytime cycles!**

F.E.D turns into F.E.E.D.

If your cycles are too short and the naps are short or non-existent; Feed, Entertain, **EXTEND** and Downtime.

Your goal is to extend the awake portion incrementally each cycle so that your baby gets a bit more tired, nap/sleep longer and then eat more at the next cycle since they are now very hungry.

Be mindful here and ensure that you are not over extending the awake time to a point where the baby is now overtired AND hungry and they won't eat or nap.

Extend the awake time wisely. For example, if you took "**Step 0**" seriously and are watching your baby carefully you may notice a consistent cycle like the one above [5/20/20].

We suggest trying to add just 5 minutes "Extend" at a time [5/20+5/20] and see how they react. The Extend period is usually not so easy because you are trying to keep your baby awake but not fussy, so it may require a lot of bouncing around the house to distract him.

As the Extend time gets consistently longer, so will the naps and in turn the feeds. You may be surprised that with time your baby will go down for a nap much easier, since she is now much more tired.

Here are some rules for extending your baby's cycles:

1. Ensure your baby had a full feed before extending the Entertain time. If she didn't feed well, go with the flow and watch for cues (hunger/sleep)
2. Do NOT force an "Extend" by more than 5 minutes at a time.
3. Any Downtime over 15 minutes should be considered a nap. If they wake up before the 15-minute mark, use the techniques below (Steps 1 to 4) to try and put them back down. If failed one or two times, stop and restart the cycle with a Feed or wait for the next hunger cues.
4. Any Downtime (naps) that reach 120 minutes should be cut short. Yes, wake up your baby from the nap. For newborns, the suggestion is that your baby should eat every 3 hours during the day so a 2-hour nap is the maximum you want to give them. This also ensures that they save their longest stretch of sleep for the night time.

Your ultimate goal is to consistently get to a 2 to 3-hour cycle. Your F.E.D cycles can look like, or be a variation of any of the following examples:

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	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Feed	10-20 mins	15-25mins	20-30mins
Entertain	30-50 mins	40-60mins	45-60mins
Downtime	30-60 mins	45-75mins	60-90mins
TOTAL Cycle Time	70-130mins	105-160mins	125-180mins

Once your baby gets on a cycle, their actions become predictable and you can stop guessing. But the question remains: **“How do you get there?”**

We are going to start by going back to **Step 0** and understanding your own unique baby and how they tell you they are getting tired.



Look for Sleepy Cues

Your baby’s sleepy cues are your key to success. Most babies show very similar cues but some have very unique ones that you will only learn after observing them carefully.

Sleepy cues are important because even though your newborn can communicate that they are getting tired, it is very likely they still can’t put themselves to sleep on their own. They need you to nudge them in the right direction (See steps 1 to 4 below).

Your first lesson is learning the general cues, so that you can pick up on your child’s own cues.

Your newborn only has so many ways to communicate with you so focus on the most common ones to get started:

“I’m Getting Ready for Downtime”	“I’m Now Ready for a Nap”	“I’m exhausted/overtired”
Red eyebrows, forehead and cheeks	Getting fussy, short cries and screams	Stiff body
Staring at one thing for extended periods	Rubbing Eyes	Tense arms and hands, making tight fists

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Turning head from side to side	Yawning	Curling toes
Taking deep, long breaths	Stretching arms above head	Arching back
		Crying hysterically



Enter the W.O.M.B.

If you've already read a few articles about newborn sleep before this one, you may have already heard that newborn babies are comforted by the familiar feel of the womb. It makes complete sense!

Since they spent so much time in the womb, and so little earth side, it is only rational that we try to simulate what they already know in order to calm them, especially at the very beginning.

The **four steps below** can be used for simply calming your baby or to get her ready for a nap or sleep. If you can identify the sleepy cues early enough, following the four steps will almost guarantee that she goes to sleep in a few short minutes.



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Step 1 – W: Wrap your Baby (Swaddle)

There are many ways to wrap a newborn baby and you probably already have a pile of “swaddle blankets” or muslins that you got at your baby shower lying around the house. Here is the thing:

DON'T USE THEM for swaddling your baby before a nap or sleep!!

Swaddle blankets and muslins are great tools for keeping your baby warm, wiping spit up and a few other tasks, but they are NOT to be used for swaddling your baby for sleep, and the reason is simple: *they WILL come loose at some point.*

As your baby grows and gets stronger, she will wiggle out of a blanket faster than you can pick them up after finishing “swaddling”. Spare yourself the grief and struggle and get a swaddle with a strong Velcro that will not come undone.

There are dozens (maybe even hundreds) of choices out there and I've tried most of them. Most of them are ok but some are just much better so I will narrow it down to 3 options for you:

[-Nested Bean swaddle \(Amazon\)](#)

[-Halo \(Amazon\)](#)

[-Ollie Swaddle \(Amazon\)](#)

At this point you may be asking yourself why would you need to swaddle you baby and is it safe? Let's start with the why.

The Moro Reflex

The moment your baby comes earth side things change for him, everything is new and maybe even slightly scary. The Moro or Startle Reflex is an involuntary reaction to an unexpected stimulation. Sometimes they don't even need an external stimulation for it to happen, it just happens.

You may have noticed the doctors and nurses checking for this reflex at the hospital and it looks something like this:



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His fingers, hands and arms (and sometimes legs) spread, shoot out very fast and go stiff, then slowly lower back down relaxing the muscles.

This is normal!

The problem is it can happen at any moment and it wakes her up! You can't stop the Moro reflex, she will eventually outgrow it, but for the first 3 months you can be sure this will be the number one reason why she wakes up.

Here is the good news; **swaddling her with the arms down and tight will help solve this problem.** Guaranteed!

More details on how to swaddle below.

But is swaddling safe?

Swaddling helps keep the baby from waking himself up, but is it safe?

Once again, the answer is a resounding YES - but don't take it from me. Let's refer to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) (<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/diapers-clothing/Pages/Swaddling-Is-it-Safe.aspx>) who assures new parents that swaddling is safe. On top of that, their studies show that **swaddled babies sleep better and longer than non swaddled babies.**

Yes, you read it right. It is scientifically proven that swaddling increases the length and quality of newborn sleep. However, there are some important guidelines to follow:

1. Swaddle babies should always be placed on their backs.
2. Swaddling with the arms down inside the swaddle must stop when your baby can turn himself over on his own (usually around 4-5 months)
3. There should be no loose blankets with the baby in the sleeping area. Another reason not to use those pesky muslin wraps.
4. Hips and legs should be loose and free to move.



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Step 2 – O: Other Way

At this point you have identified that she is tired (refer to the Tired Cues table above) and swaddled her nice and tight with a proper, Velcro swaddle. There is a good chance that she is still squirming and crying even though she is swaddled.

Does this mean she hates the swaddle? **NOOO!**

He is still tired and needs help being put to sleep. It's now time to reduce the excitement and remove anything that may help keep her up.

First on the list; **your face**.

That's right, faces are new and exciting for newborn babies. In other words, they are too much stimulation when you are trying to calm baby down for a nap or sleep.

In order to set up the right conditions and guide her closer to sleeping, turn her **The Oher Way!**

The Other Way just means that she is NOT facing you. There are many ways this can be achieved and I will show you a few below. The goal is to find a position that she likes and that you are able to hold for a few minutes. Here are some suggestions of ways we have seen work with us and other parents:

The Rugby/Football Hold

In this position, your baby's body is being supported by your forearm with the head sideways in your hand, facing away from your body. His back can touch your stomach for added support but it isn't necessary.

This position allows for full control of your newborn with one hand and allows for easy implementation of step 3 (movement). Your free hand can be used to further support your baby, to hold a pacifier or sound machine if needed (step 4).

On the negative side, this hold can become tiring for the parent pretty fast, especially as your baby grows and gets heavier. I used this hold consistently and very successfully from about 5 to 10 weeks of age.

The reverse cradle

In a regular cradle hold position, your baby's full body is held right against yours, head and body supported by your arms and facing up towards your face.

This is likely the way you first held your baby after the nurse swaddled her fresh from the womb. It's safe, supported, cuddly and allows you to stare at his perfect little face which is amazing, but not for nap time!

In the reverse cradle, you slide the baby down slightly so that the head and feet are at the same level (horizontally) and turn your baby 90 degrees away from you so that his back is right against your chest or belly. His head and neck are supported by your elbow crease and the rest of his body by your forearm and hands.

Feel free to wrap your other arm under or around her for added support. You can also still use one of your hands for a pacifier and/or sound machine.

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I found this hold to be very effective as the baby grew heavier as it still allowed her to be close, safe but not staring at my face. It was also very friendly to steps 3 and 4 in this guide.

The Shoulder Hold

The shoulder hold is a classic and a dad-favorite. In this case the baby is perpendicular to the ground and his entire front side is tight against one side of your upper body. The head is supported by your shoulder or chest in the front and you can use your other hand to hold his head from the back.

Babies usually like this position since they feel safe and close to you. Parents love it because the baby feels well supported and it is easy to move around while holding him.

The downside is that adding movement (step 3) will require you to move your whole body and can be tiring. It is also hard to get a good rhythm going sometimes. Another potential issue you may encounter with the shoulder hold is that when putting the baby down you will have to change his position from vertical to horizontal and that may wake her up. If done carefully however, it can work wonders.



Step 3 - M: Movement

It may sound counterintuitive but movement is the next step towards dream-land for your newborn. Gentle, repetitive movement is the key to your and his success. Let me explain.

Moms are famous for their “mom-bop” that instantly calms a crying baby. Dad, you too need to develop your version of the bop.

This version is slightly different though. The goal is to set the stage for sleep.

Try to imagine what it was like for your little gal growing up in the womb. Fully surrounded by the amniotic fluid, in a sack inside mom’s belly. When mom turned over in bed, stood up, walked around, etc... she was in there sleeping most of the time; and moving.

Now picture mom’s movement translated to the baby and you can imagine her floating around, gently wobbling, feeling the vibrations from mom’s body transferred to him. That’s what we are trying to mimic and there are many ways to achieve it.

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I want you to experiment with different positions, different speeds, different strengths and so on. There is no perfect bounce that works with every baby and believe me, you will have to change your bounce as your baby grows and changes as well.

So, get used to trying different movements and seeing what works.

Bring your mindset back to **Step 0** and observe her while you add movement to the equation.

Don't be scared by a little bit of crying; keep going. But if you see her getting irritated for extended periods try something else.

Faster, slower, harder, softer, turn to the other side, change positions... You will find a spot where she is nice and comfy and will start drifting away, once you find it stick with it.

Look out for the yawn, the slow blinks and the eyes closing.

Don't stop abruptly, change everything incrementally. Once you are confident she has fallen asleep, make the move to the crib or bassinet.

Here are some unusual ideas you may want to try to implement into your movement technique:

The Bobble Head

In whatever position you are holding him, try to make it so his head moves around softly like a bobble head doll. No harsh movements, just a gentle wobble.

If supporting the head in your hand or elbow crease, add a slow side to side movement so the head just sort of rolls back and forth slightly. The head motion can be magical in sending them right to sleep.

The Stairs

If you have stairs at home, slowly walk up and down, letting the "impact" from each step be felt by your baby. It's also a great workout 😊.

If you don't have stairs, try to imitate the motion of walking up and down stairs. I can confirm it works just as well.

The Stomp

Walk around the house slowly and stomp your feet just a bit harder than you would if walking normally. The cyclical vibration of the steps will help induce the right amount of movement to the process of calming baby down.

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Step 4 – B: Break the silence

Everyone tells you to whisper and not make any noise when a baby is sleeping, right? Funny thing is that **silence can be scary for a newborn.**

They just spent 9 months listening to the constant hissing sound of blood rushing through mom's placenta. Study shows that the sound inside the womb is actually as loud as a vacuum cleaner. Yes, you read that right. I'm talking about as loud as an old Hoover vacuum cleaner, not a fancy Dyson!

Then they come earth side and... Silence!

Mom and dad put baby down in the bassinet and go to sleep in a quiet room expecting her to just fall asleep but the silence is actually keeping her up.

The solution: White noise.

White noise mimics the sound of the womb for your newborn baby. It's familiar to her and therefore it's calming. If you do none of the other steps in this guide, I urge you to follow this one.

Use a sound machine

You technically don't need a sound machine; white noise is everywhere.

Your smart phone, the Google Home you already have (or [Amazon Echo](#)), your iPad/tablet and many other devices can be used to play white noise. Even an old FM radio set to a frequency with no stations will do.

The problem with those devices is that they were not made to play constant white noise that fills the room all night long. Here are some issues with other devices playing white noise:

- Phone or tablet:
 - Speaker is too small which makes the white noise sound not ideal and hard to fill a room without being too loud
 - If someone messages or calls you, it will ring/vibrate and many times stop the white noise AND wake up your baby (believe me, it happened to me multiple times)

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- Tracks are in loops and they stop and go quiet for long enough to wake up the baby
- You still need your phone or tablet while your baby is sleeping
- Smart Speaker (Google home, Echo...)
 - Tracks are in loops and sound goes out for a few seconds
 - When you ask it to play white noise it will talk back to you saying “OK, playing white noise” before actually playing it which can and will wake up your baby
 - Volume control can be annoying
 - Not portable
- FM Radio
 - If you live in a city where you can actually find a clear, vacant frequency without interference from other stations you are in luck. If you’re like me and live near any large cities, finding an unused frequency is actually harder than you think
 - Usually bulky and not easily portable

What’s a good sound machine?

There are many sound machines on the market but I would suggest considering a portable one to start and a desktop one for the baby room once you start going out more and more.

My favorite portable sound machine is the [Marpac HUSH](#). It has a long lasting battery, it hooks onto your car seat, stroller or baby bag and it has a nice and deep sound.

AS for desktop sound machines I suggest the [Homedics](#) because it just works the way it should and it affordable.

When to use white noise

White noise can and should be used anytime you are trying to calm your baby, put her down for a nap or sleep.

After continuous use, the sound of white noise will actually become a positive sleep association for your baby, to the point where it can be used in any situation to calm her down whenever needed, even if he’s not tired.

We suggest to use your sound machine not only at home but also on the go. Whether in the car, at grandma’s house or outside at the park get your newborn used to associating the sound machine with sleep and calmness.

Summary

This file has a ton of useful information for new parents and I really hope it will be helpful as you learn to navigate the nights with your new baby.

Always remember to:

1. Observe your baby with a curious mind.
2. When she cries, ask yourself: “Why could she be crying?”
3. Remember the F.E.D cycle
4. To calm your baby down follow the W.O.M.B. principle
 - a. W-wrap

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- b. O-other way
- c. M-movement
- d. B-break the silence

Remember that every baby is unique so it will take some trial and error to find the best way to use them with your unique child.

Everything you will go through is a phase that will pass and another phase will begin. Even though the newborn stage can be really tough on new parents, try to enjoy these early days of you baby's life because it will pass by very fast.

Enjoy the ride!

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me at paulo@upsidedad.com.

All the best,

Paulo

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