



# daydreaming of dreaming

Since time immemorial parents across the globe have longed for nothing more than a decent night's sleep. *Freya Paleit* explores the methods to help your baby (and in turn, you) achieve the goal of sweet slumber

**T**HERE IS ONLY ONE THING that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure", according to Paulo Coelho, the Brazilian novelist, which makes me think that he can't know many new parents because if he did, he might have added "and a screaming baby". There are many, many mums and dads out there who can only imagine what it is like to fall into a deep slumber for long enough to enjoy a dream in the first place, let alone to follow through on said dream.

### **Sleep regression**

When newborns first arrive home and sleep most of the day and night, not even twitching an eyelid when doors bang shut, vacuum cleaners hum or toddlers scream and shout right next to their crib, it is common for parents to be lulled into a false sense of security about their



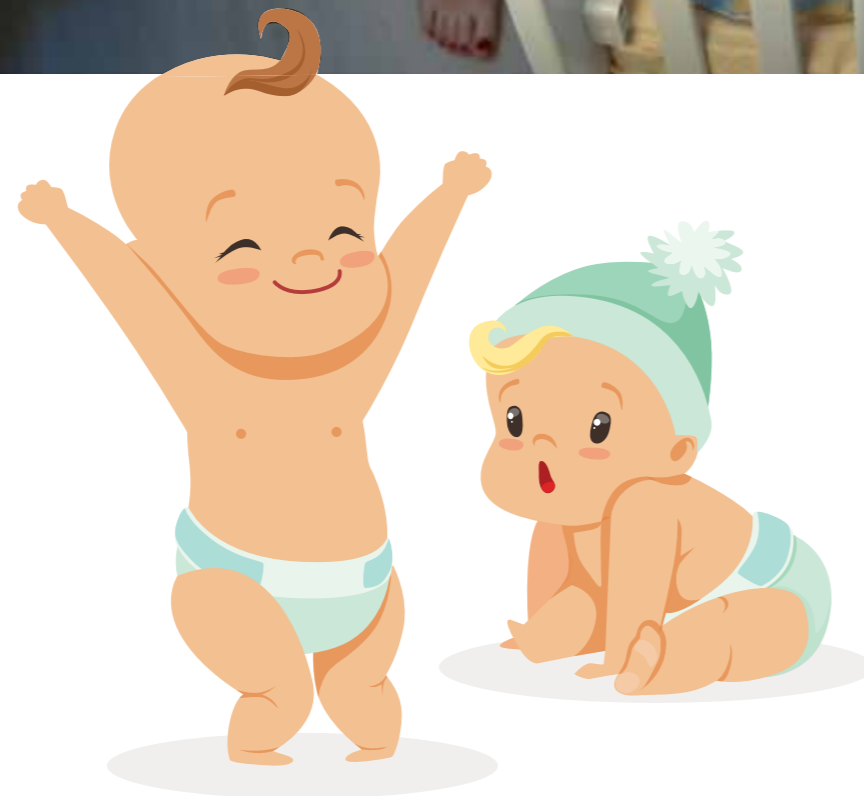


future sleep patterns. However, come four months, it all changes. The dreaded four-month sleep regression hits with a vengeance. Previously good sleepers suddenly become night owls, big nappers start to struggle to sleep during the day and relaxed babies suddenly become more fussy. "What is going on with my child?" you may well ask.

It is usual for infants to sleep well anywhere and everywhere because while they do experience a sleep cycle, they do not sleep through distinct sleep stages like an older baby or an adult does. This means that once your baby is asleep she is sound asleep and will sleep until she needs a change or is hungry. When your baby is older, she begins to enter the adult world of sleep, which means that she will be cycling in and out of very distinct sleep stages: deep sleep and active sleep. The problem is that babies often don't know how to deal with this. When the cycles slip from one stage to another, the baby wakes herself up and does not know how to send herself back to sleep.

### What's right for your baby?

There are a number of ways parents can work to help their babies develop healthy sleep habits. Some involve crying, but others involve minimal (or no) tears, and are very gentle. There is no right or wrong method of sleep training; it all comes down to your unique baby, and your unique parenting style. What works well for some babies does not work well for others, so it is not unusual to find that the techniques your friends or family



members recommend don't work the same way for your own baby.

Simona Arneodo, a sleep trainer from the UK, explains that "Babies are creatures of habit and comfort and they learn by associations. If you give the baby a prop to go to sleep such as a dummy, feeding her or rocking her, every time the child reaches the cycle of the REM sleep, (light sleep) she will look for the prop to help her get back to sleep. If none of these props are available, the baby will wake up and not be able to fall back to sleep since that's the only way she knows." Simona, along with many others, believes in routines to help teach a baby to fall asleep by herself.

Ali, a Hong Kong mother of three, on the other hand, does not believe in a rigid structure or routine for feeding or sleeping,

but rather, reacts to the noises and cues of the child. She chooses to keep her baby close by during the day and night and allows her to feed whenever she shows signs of hunger, cuddle when she wants to nuzzle into a cozy sleep etc. "Babies aren't robots - I like to listen to her changing and developing needs and meet them as and when she has them. I will adapt to her needs as she grows and as a result she sleeps well, safe in the knowledge that I am always here for her."

Many mums want to know whether one sleep-training method is better than another. That depends on the child and the parent. Researchers have reviewed the most commonly used sleep-training strategies and found that they all work equally well as long as parents are consistent. The bottom line is to pick a technique that you feel comfortable with, and that you think will work well with your baby's temperament – and your parenting style. Unfortunately many parents who reach the point of looking for a sleep training method, are already too exhausted themselves to think through the pros and cons of different strategies and go on to plough half-heartedly into many different methods, giving up half-way through each. This is confusing for child and parent alike and usually does not end up successfully.

Before you get started, you might do well to ask yourself the following questions: What kind of personality does my

## TOPTIPS

**Create a pattern for your baby throughout the day: they wake up, you feed them, they play and then you put them down to sleep - REPEAT.**

Routine for sleep time: as you put your baby down to sleep, day or night, run through the same routine to prepare your baby for sleep. This might be closing the curtains, putting them in their sleeping bag, reading a story or singing a song. This repetitive process prepares the baby and lets her know it is time to settle down for sleep.

Keep your baby's room dark: close the curtains and turn off the lights before sleep time.

Offer your baby a soft toy or comforter to take to bed each night - this familiar item can be reassuring for your baby and can help to settle her.

Make sure your baby is warm enough - a chilly baby will wake more frequently (but ensure that your baby's blankets are safely tucked in and not loose and that your baby does not overheat, as these have been related to an increase in SIDS).





baby have? Observe how your baby responds to new or stressful situations. Is she pretty relaxed or need lots of comforting? Is she flexible and easygoing or determined to get her own way? Which sleep-training method am I most likely to stick with? Your ability to commit to a sleep programme is obviously key to its success, so consider your own needs. If the sound of your baby's sobs makes you want to break down in tears, consider a slower approach that involves minimal crying. How will it affect everyone else in the house? And lastly how long is it likely to take?

### Five common sleep training methods

#### 1 The fading sleep training method

This is a very gentle, no-cry (or very little cry) method of sleep coaching. With the fading method, you continue to help your baby fall asleep (by rocking or feeding to sleep, for instance), but over time, you gradually do less and less of the 'work' to put your baby to sleep, and your baby does more and more. For instance, if you normally rock your baby completely to sleep, you may shorten the amount of time you rock each night, until you are rocking for only a few minutes. This method requires lots of patience on the parents' part, but it's great for families who want to minimise crying as much as possible.

#### 2 The pick-up-put-down method

This is another gentle technique and is promoted in Tracy Hogg's popular book *The Secrets of the Baby Whisperer*. The PUPD method works just the way it sounds: when it's time to sleep, and your baby is fussing in her cot, you pick her up and comfort her until she's calm and drowsy. Then, you put her back in her cot to sleep, repeating this cycle until your baby is finally asleep. PUPD is another method that requires lots of patience, and it won't work for every baby; some babies find being



picked up and put down so often overstimulating, and they gradually become worked up, instead of relaxed.

#### 3 The chair method for sleep training

This method involves more tears than the previous two, but, you don't leave your baby unattended in the room at all. Here's how the chair method works: you start by running through your normal bedtime routine but then instead of leaving your baby to sleep, you sit on a chair very near the crib and stay on it while your baby falls asleep. The goal is not to help your child fall asleep, nor to help her calm down. You are generally not supposed to give your child any attention. The reason you are in the chair is only to reassure your child that you are there with them. Each night you move the chair further and further away from the crib until you

are right outside the door. Eventually, you no longer need the chair at all. As you might suspect, this method can be very difficult, depending on your baby's temperament, and it can take many days or weeks. It can be difficult to avoid engaging with your child, and it may well be a little confusing to the child (particularly younger ones) when you don't. However, with time and consistency, this can be a good option for parents who do not want to leave their child alone to cry but who haven't had success with other methods.

#### 4 The Ferber sleep method

This is considered a 'cry' method of sleep training. With this technique, you allow your baby to cry, but continue to return to her at intervals in order to calm her down. The goal here is to reassure her every so often that you are nearby, and to reassure yourself that she is okay. When you go to check on your baby, you are not supposed to pick her up nor engage her much, but simply reassure using your voice and a loving pat for 2-3 minutes, tops (watch the clock!). With this method, the goal is NOT to help your baby fall asleep – that is what she is learning to do on her own! Instead, the idea is that she falls asleep on her own, in the same environment in which she will awake periodically throughout the night. The knowledge of how to fall asleep unassisted at bedtime will pave the way for her to go back to sleep throughout the night. Over time, you gradually increase the amount of time between your checks. The first night, you might check on your baby every 10 minutes; the next night, you would check every 15 minutes. Continue increasing your check intervals by about 5 minutes every night.

#### 5 The extinction sleep training method (aka 'cry it out')

This sleep training technique involves lots of crying on your baby's part. The way it works is simple – you do your bedtime routine, put your baby to bed awake, and then leave the room without



returning for checks. If your baby cries, you do not go in to check on her; instead, you let her 'cry it out' on her own. The thinking here is that if you allow your baby to cry for a period of time, but then go in and 'rescue' her, you have all but guaranteed that she will cry for that amount of time the next night, because she will expect you to come and rescue her again. Some people swear this method teaches babies quickly how to fall asleep on their own, while others find it a tad cruel.

In Simona's opinion, sleep training lasts between three and five days, "I don't believe people can achieve results in fewer days or by just working with the baby at night. In my experience, what is happening at night is often a reflection of the day and unless you are with the baby 24 hours over the period of the training, where you establish a routine, make necessary changes and monitor how the baby behaves and responds, you will not achieve the expected results."

You may need to put in quite a bit of effort and to strengthen your resolve to get to the stage where your baby regularly sleeps through the night by herself, but once you have, you can get back to drifting off to the land of nod and your own sweet dreams. 🧠

### BABY SLEEP SUPPORT

#### Baby Cloud HK

Anne Laure Lemaitre, based in Hong Kong [www.babycloudhk.com](http://www.babycloudhk.com)

#### Blissful Bubbies

Sharne Dolich works remotely from Australia. She can be found on [facebook.com/blissfulbubbies](https://www.facebook.com/blissfulbubbies).

#### Simona Arneodo

Based in the UK but comes to Hong Kong regularly for clients [www.maternalbliss.com](http://www.maternalbliss.com)

#### Baby Sleep Fairy

Based in Singapore but through Skype helps clients around the world. [www.babysleepfairy.com](http://www.babysleepfairy.com)

#### The Round Clinic

If your infant has trouble sleeping, a few visits to a cranial osteopath can work wonders. By relieving overall discomfort, the gentle treatment can improve sleep. [www.theroundclinic.com](http://www.theroundclinic.com)