



Child Sleep Consulting
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Your Nine to Twelve Month Old Baby and Sleep

Babies at this age on average need eleven hours of sleep at night and three during the day. At nine months, babies should nap for about an hour and a half in the morning and about one and a half to two hours in the afternoon. Most have given up that brief, third late-afternoon nap. By twelve months, the morning nap is about an hour, and the afternoon nap is about an hour and a half.

These babies are more mobile, crawling and pulling themselves up in their cribs, and can pop up each time you put them down at bedtime. Some walk by their first birthday, a major developmental milestone that can temporarily disrupt sleep. Increased activity can tire them out, so you have to pay very close attention to their sleep window, when they are most ready and able to fall asleep. Some can fight sleep, and conceal that window. If you wean during this period, that can also alter the rhythms of bedtime.

Babies have peaks of separation anxiety at about nine months, when they are crawling and sitting, and at twelve months, when they are standing, walking, and climbing. Those physical leaps often make them wake up more at night, at least temporarily, and the accompanying cognitive leaps make them more aware of strangers, places, and change.

Most babies can now pull themselves up and stand—which creates some new twists at bedtime or naptime when you put them down in the crib and they can pop back up again. I usually tell parents not to intervene (if the baby knows how to get down), or to put the baby down once, but only once. While you are sitting next to the crib, pat the mattress and encourage your baby to lie down. If you sit, he will be more likely to sit down to be on your level. Babies do tend to learn how to get up before they can get back down, so let her practice during the day. Let her stand up and try to get down holding on to the coffee table—after you baby proof the corners and put some pillows around if needed. Games like ring-around-the-rosy are also good for developing up-and-down motions. But do the practicing games out of the crib, during awake time, not at naps or bedtime.

Introduce a cup before the first birthday, even if you are still nursing, and even if you plan on nursing for some time to come. As babies get older, they can get emotionally attached to the bottle or breast. It basically becomes their primary and sometimes only way to soothe themselves, and that can contribute to an ingrained habit of waking up at night in search of it. Try to nurse or bottlefeed at set times or upon wake up, and use the cup at set times, giving him water, expressed breast milk, milk, soy milk, formula, diluted juice, whatever your doctor recommends.

Moms often find that they and the baby both like nursing in the morning and evening and using the cup during the day, especially with solids at mealtimes. Don't let him fall asleep on the breast or with the bottle, and don't let him be dependent on nursing to fall asleep or stay asleep, or you'll be up nursing him back to sleep all night for months to come.

Sample Schedule

- 7:00–7:30 a.m. Wake-up. Nurse/bottle/cup and breakfast.
- 9:00–9:30 a.m. Start the morning nap. If your child is sleeping eleven to twelve hours uninterrupted at night he might be able to stay awake until 10:00 a.m. (or three hours after waking up). Some children need a small morning snack after the nap.
- 12:00–12:30 p.m. Lunch with nurse/bottle/cup.
- 1:00–2:00 p.m. Start the afternoon nap. Snack upon awakening.
- 5:00–6:00 p.m. Dinner with nurse/bottle/cup.
- 7:00–7:30 p.m. Bedtime with nurse/bottle.

Although I don't believe in completely rigid schedules, young children do need consistency and predictability. Schedules obviously vary somewhat from one child to the next. A baby who wakes up at 6:30 a.m. will have a slightly different timetable than one who gets up at 7:30. But this is a good model, so try not to deviate too much. Especially don't let the baby stay up too late at night, no matter how much fun he seems to be having.

It's a good idea to introduce your baby to a cup by 9 months old, so by the time she's 12 months old (or very soon after), she'll be weaned off the bottle. Around 15 months, many babies become attached to objects like bottles and pacifiers, so if your child is still drinking from a bottle after 15 months old (especially before going to sleep), it's going to be especially tough to wean her off of it.

Check with your pediatrician, but healthy children from nine to twelve months on a normal growth curve can almost always go eleven to twelve hours at night without a feeding. If your child is still waking to eat frequently, you probably have to either adjust his body clock or change his habits.



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