



How to cope with Sleep Deprivation

Sleep Deprivation is hard, especially during the newborn stage. When you are sleep deprived you cannot really function properly, which is extremely important if you are a new mom.

It can get even harder when being sleep deprived goes beyond the newborn stage or even the first year.

Here are some points I would like to remind you (just in case you need it)

- Infant sleep varies significantly during the first few years of life.
- It is completely normal for children, especially infants, to wake up frequently when they sleep in close sensory proximity to their mom (or primary caregiver).
- Babies work on their natural sleep rhythm during the first 6 months of life. So, it is completely normal if daytime naps and nighttime sleep are not consistent.
- It might take up to 6 years for mom and dad to get back to their usual sleep cycle. That's when a child might start not having sleep challenges.
- Sleep is a really vulnerable state to go into. Children don't really fight sleep, they just don't like being apart from you.
- If a baby or infant sleeps for a 5-6 hour stretch, congratulations your baby is sleeping through the night.
- Last but not least, this too shall pass... You will sleep again.



We can't "cure" sleep deprivation as it is part of having a baby. However, there are lots of things we can do to help mom and dad sleep better.

Here are a few suggestions:

Realistic expectations: it is critical that learn about normal infant sleep. This will help you know what to expect and, hopefully, you won't get too stressed or frustrated about it.

Talk about your sleep needs: talk about the best way for you and your partner to handle sleep deprivation before the baby arrives. This is a good way to make sure both, your and your partner's needs, are taken into consideration. It is also a good way to make sure you are both on the same page regarding sleep and how to deal with any challenges.

Use the hospital nursery: once the baby arrives, do not rush to go home. Stay there for as long as you are allowed and let a trained professional help you the nights you are in the hospital. Even if it is only a couple of nights, those can help you recover from birth and get a bit more of energy to take care of the baby once you are back home.

Sleep when the baby sleeps: I know this is easier said than done, and pretty much impossible if you have a toddler to take care of. However, if once in a while you can prioritize taking a nap while your baby naps, it can do wonders for you; and as a bonus you get to enjoy some baby snuggles. If you have another child, a way to do this is by bringing in your support village. Ask someone to look after your older child while you take a nap with your baby.



Get an early night or sleep in: this is a variation of the previous point. Be mindful of your sleep hygiene and avoid staying up late once your baby has gone to sleep. I know this can be hard as this might be the only time you can have for yourself or for your partner but you can try doing this a few nights a week. Another way is to ask your partner to look after the kids in the morning while you sleep in for a bit.

Share the nights (if you can): if you are bottle feeding, you could ask your partner to do a couple of feedings during the night. This way you could get a good 4 hour sleep, which can totally make the difference.

Breastsleeping: if you are exclusively breastfeeding, then breastsleeping is a life saver. Safe breastsleeping is bed-sharing in the context of breastfeeding in the absence of all other hazardous factors (Mckenna, J, 2020). Please note that this should be done only if following the safety guidelines. If you would like to know more about this, you should read Professor James Mckenna's book "Safe Infant Sleep".

Learn to say no: do not take on any extra responsibilities when you have a newborn. Do not feel guilty to ask your partner or any relatives or friends to look after your older child to squeeze in a nap or even just rest. Also, do not feel afraid of saying no to visitors or any social commitment. When you have a newborn, it is important to put yourself first and have room to sleep for a while if you feel like it without having the pressure of any social commitment.



Support, support and more support: make sure you create a support village, whether it is family or friends, do not be afraid of asking for help. People could help you by bringing you food whenever possible. Eating healthy and balanced meals can make the difference when sleep deprived. They could also look after the baby while you or your partner do some meal prep over the weekend. This can help you stay on track with your meals during the week. Cooking could also be a nice break for you and a chance to spend some quality time with your partner. Your support village could also help by cleaning up your place, looking after older children, being a shoulder to cry on, among others.

Get some fresh air (bonus points if you manage to get some movement): this can be particularly helpful when you are feeling like running out of energy. There is something about being in contact with nature, getting some fresh air and doing some exercise that can make you feel energized.

Don't let stress affect you: if you feel stressed it's even harder to fall asleep. If this is the case, try doing some relaxation exercises, mindfulness (whenever possible) or even reading a book in bed can help you fall asleep.

Be aware of any possible perinatal mood disorders: postnatal depression or even the baby blues can impact sleep (eg if you can't sleep even when your baby sleeps). If you are experiencing any of the symptoms, talk to your family doctor to get screened.



Make peace with it: do not look at the clock while dealing with all the night wakings. This can only make you feel more stressed or frustrated, which will make even harder to fall asleep.

Know that you can make changes: if something is no longer working for you and your baby, know that you can always make some changes so that everyone can get more sleep. And no, this does not have to involve any type of sleep training.

Drink lots of water: it is important to stay hydrated so that you can feel better.

Avoid coffee (when possible): yes, I know! Coffee might seem like the only thing keeping you sane at the moment, but it can actually be causing more harm than good. If you drink lots of coffee, that might be the reason why you cannot sleep when your baby does. So, it's better to avoid it when possible.

Now, if you must have coffee, my advice would be to have a morning coffee after you have eaten something first or at least drink your coffee while eating something with it. This will help you avoid the energy spike that coffee gives you when you have it with an empty stomach.

Also, avoid caffeine or stimulants 7 hours before bed as this is the amount of time that will take stimulants to clear from our systems.

YOU CAN DO THIS!

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