



# Tips to Thrive Through Sleep Deprivation: A Practical Guide for Parents

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Sleep deprivation is undeniably challenging, particularly during the newborn stage. When you are sleep deprived, it is hard to function properly, which is extremely important as parents.

It can get even harder when being sleep deprived goes beyond the newborn stage or even the first year of your baby's life. In such trying times, it is crucial to bear in mind a few key points:

1. **Understanding Infant Sleep:** Infant sleep undergoes significant variations during the initial years of life.
2. **Frequent Waking is Normal:** It is completely normal for infants, especially when in close sensory proximity to their primary caregiver, to wake up frequently throughout the night.
3. **Natural Sleep Rhythm:** Babies develop their natural sleep rhythm in the first six months. So, it is completely normal if daytime naps and nighttime sleep are not consistent.
4. **Patience with Sleep Challenges:** It may take up to six years for parents to return to their usual sleep cycle as children gradually overcome sleep challenges.
5. **Sleep as Vulnerability:** Sleep is a really vulnerable state to go into. Children do not really fight sleep, they just do not like being apart from you.
6. **Celebrate Milestones:** If your baby achieves a 5-6 hour stretch of sleep, congratulations—your baby is officially sleeping through the night.
7. **This Too Shall Pass:** Remember, amidst the fatigue and challenges, that this phase is temporary. Rest assured, you will sleep again.



Sleep deprivation is an inherent part of welcoming a baby into your life, and while we cannot eliminate it entirely, there are numerous strategies to enhance the sleep quality for both mum and dad. Here are some suggestions to consider:

**Realistic Expectations:** Understanding normal infant sleep is crucial. Educate yourself on what to expect, reducing potential stress and frustration.

**Open Communication about Sleep Needs:** Discuss with your partner how to handle sleep deprivation before the baby's arrival. Ensure that both your needs and your partner's needs are considered, fostering a shared understanding of how to navigate sleep challenges.

**Utilise Hospital Resources:** Take advantage of the hospital nursery. Instead of rushing home, stay for as long as possible to allow trained professionals to assist during nights. Even a couple of nights can significantly contribute to your post-birth recovery and provide the energy needed to take care of the baby once you are back home.

**Embrace Rest When the Baby Sleeps:** While challenging, make an effort to prioritise rest when your baby sleeps. Although it may seem impossible with a toddler in the picture, occasionally taking a nap during your baby's sleep can work wonders. Enlist the support of your village—ask someone to care for your older child, granting you the opportunity for a much needed nap accompanied by precious baby snuggles.



**Prioritise Early Nights or Sleep-Ins:** Mindful sleep hygiene is essential. Resist the temptation to stay up late after your baby has gone to sleep. While it may be the only time for personal or partner activities, consider incorporating early nights or sleep-ins a few times a week. Alternatively, ask your partner to manage morning responsibilities, allowing you some extra time to rest.

**Share the Night Duties (if you can):** If you are bottle-feeding, collaborate with your partner to share nighttime feedings. This arrangement can provide you with a solid four-hour block of sleep, making a significant difference in your overall well-being.

**Explore BreastSleeping:** For exclusively breastfeeding parents, safe breastsleeping can be a lifesaver. 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, Professor James Mckenna's book "Safe Infant Sleep" provides valuable insights.

**Master the Art of Saying No:** When caring for a newborn, it is crucial to set boundaries. Do not take on extra responsibilities, and do not hesitate to seek support from your partner, relatives, or friends to care for older children, allowing you the opportunity for a nap or rest. Moreover, feel empowered to decline visitors or social commitments. Putting yourself first during this period is essential, providing you with the freedom to prioritise sleep without the pressure of external obligations.



**Embrace Support:** Do not hesitate to ask for help. Whether it is from family or friends, building a support system is crucial. People could help you by bringing you food whenever possible. Eating healthy and balanced meals can make the difference when sleep deprived. Your support network can also take care of the baby, giving you and your partner time for meal prep over the weekend, ensuring a smoother week ahead. Cooking together can also be a refreshing break and an opportunity for quality time with your partner. Your support village can go beyond the basics. Enlist help with cleaning, caring for older children, and providing emotional support. Having someone to lean on can make a significant difference during challenging times.

**Embrace the Outdoors:** 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 energised.

**Manage Stress Effectively:** Stress can hinder your ability to fall asleep. Combat stress by incorporating relaxation exercises, mindfulness practices (when possible), or even indulging in some bedtime reading. These activities can create a soothing pre-sleep routine.

**Monitor Mood Changes:** Be attentive to potential perinatal mood disorders like postnatal depression or baby blues, as they can impact sleep patterns. If you find it challenging to sleep even when your baby sleeps and are experiencing related symptoms, consult your family doctor for a screening and appropriate guidance.



**Don't Watch the Clock:** Resist the temptation to constantly check the time during night wakings. This can only add unnecessary stress and frustration, making it even more challenging to fall back asleep.

**Embrace Change:** Know that you have the power to make adjustments. If a routine or approach is no longer working for you and your baby, be open to making changes without resorting to sleep training. Flexibility can be a key ally in improving everyone's sleep.

**Stay Hydrated:** Drinking plenty of water is essential for your overall well-being. Ensure you stay hydrated, as it can contribute to a better feeling and functioning body.

**Moderate Coffee Consumption:** While coffee might seem like a lifeline, excessive consumption can interfere with your ability to sleep. If you must indulge, have your morning coffee after eating or accompany it with a snack to avoid energy spikes on an empty stomach. Additionally, steer clear of caffeine or stimulants at least 7 hours before bedtime to allow your system to clear these substances.

**YOU CAN DO THIS!**

By implementing small changes and approaching challenges with a positive mindset, you will be better equipped to navigate the ups and downs of parenthood.