

## Oxfordshire Breastfeeding Support

### What happens to babies' sleep at four months?



Babies often start waking more at night around 4 months. Perhaps your baby has already started doing this, or perhaps you have read about the so-called “4 month sleep regression” and are wondering what lies ahead.

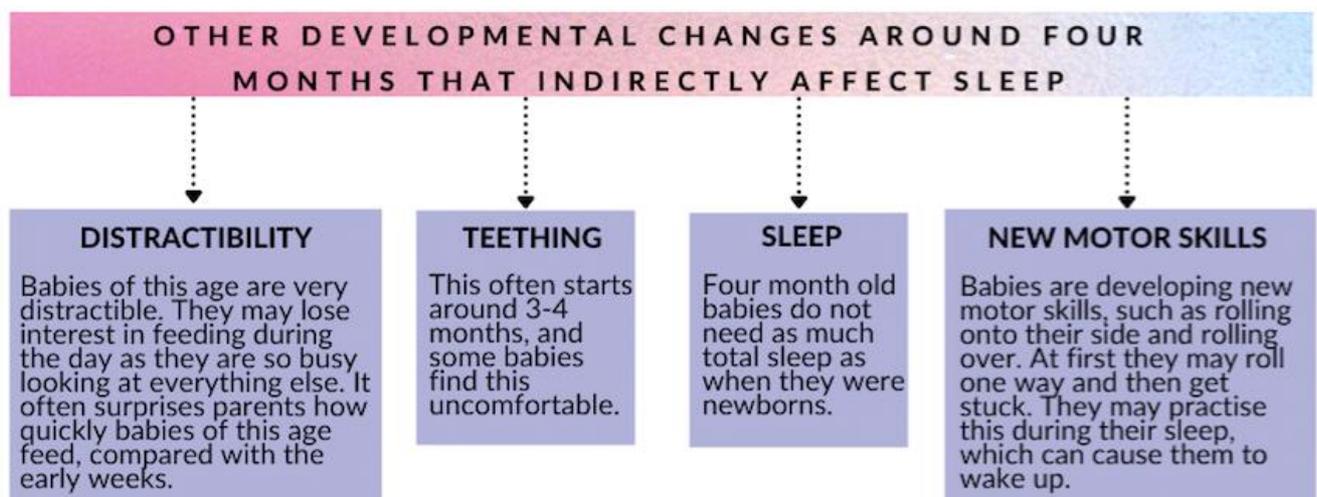
**This document contains evidence-based information to help you understand what babies are experiencing around 4 months, and some ideas for making it through this tiring phase.**

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#### What changes at four months?

- ❖ At the age of 4 months a baby’s sleep begins to mature **(1)**. They start to have different stages and cycle to their sleeping pattern, similar to adults. This is a step forward in their development: a progression, rather than a “regression”!
- ❖ Babies begin to have two new stages of sleep **(2)**. They transition from light sleep to deeper sleep and have the light active sleep phase at the end of their sleep cycle rather than at the beginning, as newborn babies do.
- ❖ These new stages and transitions between states of sleep are believed to unsettle babies and disturb both night-time sleep and naps.

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**\*Babies often make up for feeding less during the day by feeding more at night\***

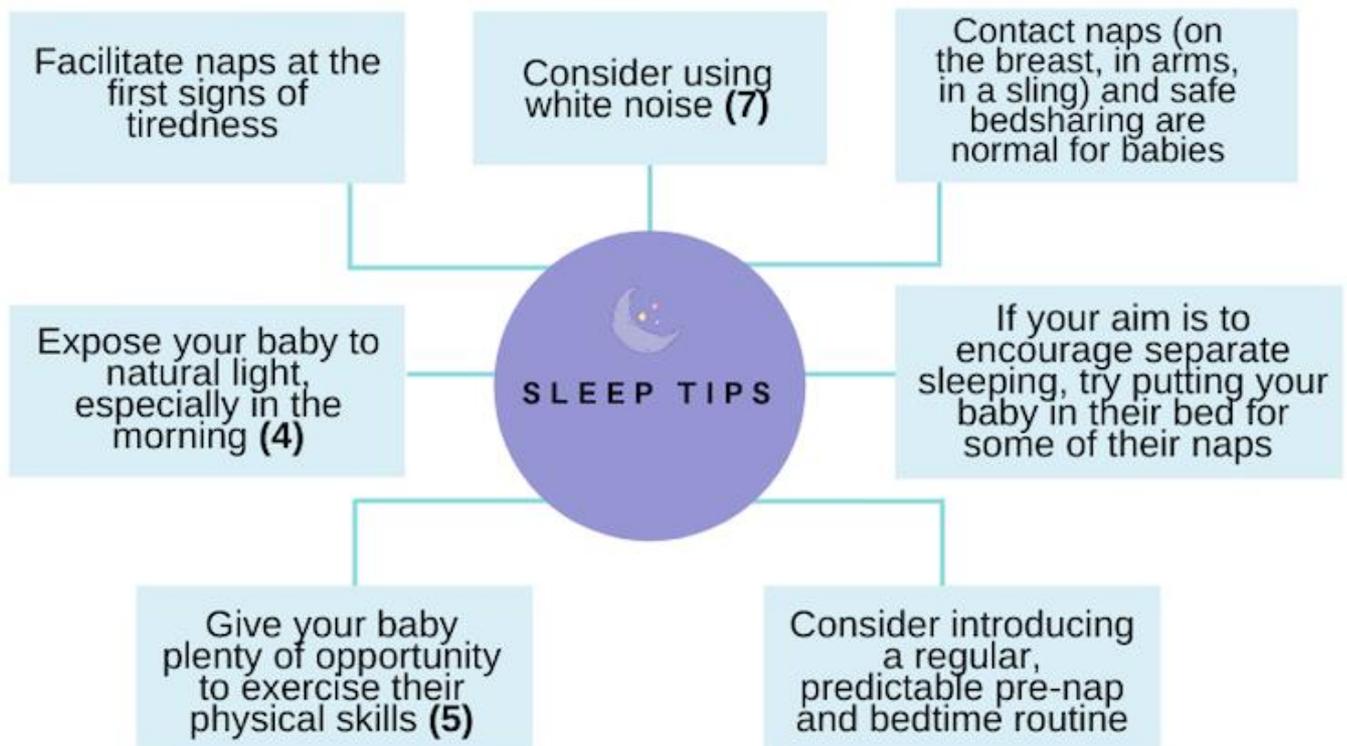


## What can you do to optimize feeding?

1. If your baby is very distractible when feeding during the day, try feeding in a darkened room or a place with limited distractions, such as a bedroom **(3)**.
2. Some babies feed with more focus in a sling, while walking.
3. You could try giving your baby a nursing necklace or other object (scarf, piece of cloth, safe brooch, small toy) for them to explore while feeding.
4. Do breast compressions to stimulate the flow of milk, and switch sides when your baby slows down and starts to lose interest. This can encourage more active feeding.
5. Consider doing a “dream feed” before you go to bed if you think your baby has not fed well during the day. This means gently rousing your baby just enough to feed.

## What can you do to maximize your baby’s sleep?

The following suggestions have all been shown to improve sleep:



It is sometimes suggested that introducing formula milk helps babies to sleep for longer. However, research shows that breastfeeding mothers, especially those who sleep with their babies, get more sleep than mothers of formula-fed babies **(8)**. This is probably because they can feed with minimal disruption, and the hormones of feeding help both baby and mother fall asleep again quickly afterwards.

## Final thoughts

- ❖ Looking after babies who are waking up a lot is very tiring, especially if you also have older children, or don't have a lot of support during the day. **You are doing nothing wrong, and neither is your baby.**
- ❖ You might find some of the ideas above can help, but a lot of how babies sleep is down to genes, and luck! Your baby will sleep for longer when they are ready.
- ❖ Get as much sleep and rest as you can, and reach out for help if you are feeling overwhelmed. There are many other parents in the OBS community who have been through this stage with their babies too and would love to support you.

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## References

- 1) Chu, C.J., Leahy, J., Pathmanathan, J., Kramer, M.A. and Cash, S.S., 2014. The maturation of cortical sleep rhythms and networks over early development. *Clinical Neurophysiology*, 125(7), pp.1360-1370.
- 2) Galland, B.C., Taylor, B.J., Elder, D.E. and Herbison, P., 2012. Normal sleep patterns in infants and children: A systematic review of observational studies. *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, 16(3), pp.213-222.
- 3) 'The Distractible Baby'. Available at: <https://kellymom.com/ages/older-infant/distractible-baby/>
- 4) Rivkees, S.A., 2007. The development of circadian rhythms: from animals to humans. *Sleep Medicine Clinics*, 2(3), pp.331-341.
- 5) Allen, S.L., Howlett, M.D., Coulombe, J.A. and Corkum, P.V., 2016. ABCs of SLEEPING: A review of the evidence behind pediatric sleep practice recommendations. *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, 29, pp.1-14.
- 6) Mindell, J.A., Telofski, L.S., Wiegand, B. and Kurtz, E.S., 2009. A nightly bedtime routine: impact on sleep in young children and maternal mood. *Sleep*, 32(5), pp.599-606.
- 7) Borkowski, M.M., Hunter, K.E. and Johnson, C.M., 2001. White noise and scheduled bedtime routines to reduce infant and childhood sleep disturbances. *The Behavior Therapist*, 24(2), pp.29-37.
- 8) Kendall-Tackett, K., & Cong, Z., & Hale, T., 2011. The Effect of Feeding Method on Sleep Duration, Maternal Well-being, and Postpartum Depression. *Clinical Lactation*. 2, pp.22-26.

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## USEFUL RESOURCES

### Recommended books

[Let's talk about your new family's sleep](#), by Lyndsey Hookway (2020)

[The Positive Breastfeeding Book: Everything you need to feed your baby with confidence](#), by Amy Brown (2018)

[Safe Infant Sleep: Expert answers to your cosleeping questions](#), by James McKenna (2020)

[Sweet Sleep: Nighttime and naptime strategies for the breastfeeding family](#), La Leche League (2014)

[The Gentle Sleep Book: Gentle, no-tears, sleep solutions for parents of newborns to five-year-olds](#), by Sarah Ockwell-Smith (2015).

### Recommended websites

<https://www.basisonline.org.uk/>

<https://www.parentingscience.com/newborn-sleep.html>

<https://kellymom.com/parenting/nighttime/sleep/>

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/sleep-and-night-time-resources/caring-for-your-baby-at-night/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/caring-for-a-newborn/helping-your-baby-to-sleep/>

<https://www.laleche.org.uk/sleep-breastfed-baby/>