

The Baby's Clock

It is often said that a small baby sleeps a lot and eats all the time. A baby can eat every couple of hours, several times an hour or hours at a time. All this is ordinary life as an infant or a baby.

Some babies fall into a fairly regular eat-sleep-interact cycle – the “three-hour cycle”. However, there are several different phases in a 24-hour period. Also, the baby's routine changes several times within the first year.

**9 a.m.
to 4 p.m.**



A regular nine-to-five baby

Vauva on melko tyytyväinen. The baby is fairly content. He eats, is awake, you can interact and play with him. As the baby starts rooting, offer him the breast. The baby eats, falls asleep, wakes up, eats more and continues playing.

You feel you have fallen into a nice routine. You'll be able to do things with the baby: take a stroll, go to town, attend a mom and baby playgroup. You can start preparing dinner. If you feel tired, go take a rest while the baby sleeps.

**4 p.m.
to 7 p.m.**



A restless early-evening baby

As the day turns into evening, the baby's rhythm seems to

change. He is not concentrating on eating, sleep is choppy and he acts grumpy. He is not happy in a bouncer or on the bed, but if you pick him up, he keeps on fussing.

All of a sudden, the baby feels too demanding and nothing can soothe him. You may feel incompetent and incapable. This is often the time when your partner returns from work and you have no time to talk about your day or enjoy your baby.

Now is the time to soothe the baby. It may lift your spirits to do something concrete. Pick the baby up, hold him in your arms, put him in a sling and move around. Do some chores that you are able to do one-handed while holding the baby. Go for a walk with the baby in a sling. Bounce on an exercise ball holding the baby. Listen to music.

Both parents or any other family members or friends can take part in all this. Whenever the baby starts rooting or is close to crying, offer him the breast, no matter how often or seldom it is. Sometimes he will accept the breast, sometimes you have to keep on moving. The baby may fall asleep, but don't expect a long sleep period at this time. More often than not, the baby wakes up in fifteen minutes and wants more.

Fussiness in the evening is completely normal for a baby. It doesn't mean that there is not enough milk or that you are doing a poor job as a parent. Babies also get tired towards evening and need your help to calm down. Although it seems impossible to soothe a tired baby, your closeness and caring will make him feel safe.

**7 p.m.
to 10 p.m.**



Time for cluster feeding

In the evening, it is typical for a baby to feed for a long time, an hour, even three. The baby is filling up with fatty evening milk and the milk flow at this time can be a little slower.

The mother may feel sofa-bound during cluster feeding. Sitting still is frustrating, the baby just nurses and naps with the nipple in his mouth. You can't go anywhere, you can't do anything! It may be easier to bear this if you keep in mind that this phase is completely normal. You have a perfect chance to keep yourself up-to-



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date with what is happening in the world, watch the news, read something. This is your time to sit, relax and enjoy your favourite movies.

The amount of melatonin and other substances that control the sleep-wake rhythm increase in your milk in the evenings. Cluster feeding is the baby's way to prepare for a good night's sleep.

10 p.m. to midnight



Sleepy time

Some babies fall asleep after the cluster feeding. Others may be alert and playful for a while before finally falling asleep, often with a nipple in their mouth.

It may take up to 20 minutes for the baby to fall into deep sleep. To avoid waking him up, it would be smart to wait for this time before placing him into his bed to sleep.

The time is now something between nine and midnight. At this time, the baby usually sleeps for a longer period, something between 3 and 5 hours. This is also a good time for the mother to catch some sleep, even though it may feel it is now your opportunity to stay up and do something for yourself. When the mother and the baby sleep together, their sleep-wake cycles synchronize. When the baby wakes up to eat, the mother is also in a stage of light sleep.

1 a.m. to 6 a.m.



The restless early morning hours

After the longer sleeping period, the baby's sleep often gets



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choppier. If the mother stayed up, she can be at her most tired when the baby starts night fussing in the wee hours. The baby makes noises, awakes, eats, looks around. He takes short naps. The baby may be sleeping periodically, but still wants to feed every hour.

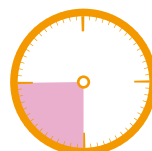
It is not possible to force a baby to adapt to a sleeping pattern. Therefore, it is the parents who should try and make the night as easy as possible for themselves. If sleeping in the same bed with the baby doesn't feel comfortable, at least have the baby's bed next to yours, at a hand's reach.

And if the baby refuses to sleep, keep the lights off and don't engage with him. You should naturally breastfeed, hug and cuddle your baby.

Some babies can sleep as long as eight hours a night uninterrupted. If your breasts don't become engorged, the baby grows well and the first feeding in the morning is not too difficult due to engorging,

there is no need to feed the baby when he sleeps. Let the baby sleep and enjoy, because it is very much possible that there will be fussy nights during the baby's first year.

6 a.m. to 9 a.m.



Wake up and sleep some more

Had the baby slept or not, he will wake up around six or seven in the morning. Now he wants to eat and interact with you. This is a good time for a nappy change.

If you don't have to get up yet, it is nice to go back to bed and nap a bit more after a choppy night. In the morning babies often sleep for another hour or so and this gives you the opportunity to relax and catch some more sleep.

Back to the day rhythm!

A new day has dawned and the baby is happy and alert. It looks

like the baby has caught on to a rhythm, until the evening comes again.

This too shall pass. Within the next weeks and months, there will be changes, more rhythm and easier days.

All babies are not like this, there is as much individual variation as there are babies. The most important thing is to realize that the changing behaviour is normal, including fussing and cluster feeding in the evenings. This will help you to adjust into all the changes a small baby brings on.

Original idea: public health nurse Ritva Kuusisto

References:
Arslanoglu S, Bertino E, Nicocia M, Moro GE. 2012. WAPM Working Group on Nutrition: potential chronobiotic role of human milk in sleep regulation.