

## Your Baby's Sleep and Wake States

*What they mean and what to do*

### Quiet Sleep

During quiet sleep, a baby's eyes are tightly shut and still. Their breathing is regular. They do not move much, except for startles or mouthing.

A lot of a development happens during quiet sleep. Unless it is time to give a baby important medical care, it is best to let them sleep.



*Quiet sleep*

### Active Sleep

During active sleep, a baby's eyes are closed, but you can see the eyes moving slowly beneath the eyelids. The baby may open their eyes briefly, have irregular breathing, or move their mouth as if they are sucking. A baby may also twitch or lightly stretch.

A lot of development happens during active sleep, too. Your baby should be allowed to stay asleep unless it is a care time.



*Active sleep*

### Drowsy

When babies are drowsy, they open and close their eyes but do not focus on anything. Their eyelids seem heavy, as if it is hard to keep them open.

Their breathing is faster and shallower than in the sleep states, and the baby moves more. There is often a delayed response to voices and other noises.



*Drowsy*

When your baby is in a drowsy state, it is not a good time for interaction. It is best to help your baby stay calm. Carefully follow any cues your baby gives about what they want to do next.

### **Quiet Alert**

When a baby is quietly alert, their eyes are wide open, bright, and shining. The baby may gaze at their caregiver's face, but will not move their body much. Their breathing is regular and calm.

This is a good time to interact with your baby. If they get drowsy or more active, stay calm and let them interact less.

### **Active Alert**

During the active alert state, a baby's eyes are usually open. When they move, they may also grimace or make small sounds. Their breathing is regular.

During this state, it may be hard to get your baby to interact since they are trying to calm themselves. Help your baby calm before you try to interact (see handouts listed below).

### **Fussing or Crying**

During strong crying, a baby's breathing, heart rate, and blood pressure may be irregular.

When your baby is fussy, try to help calm them. For tips on how to do this, read the handouts "Caring for Your Baby," "Your Baby's Comfort," and "Helping Your Baby Calm."

Resources: [Peekaboobicu.net](http://Peekaboobicu.net), [Handtohold.org](http://Handtohold.org), [Premiebabies101.com](http://Premiebabies101.com)



*Quiet alert*



*Active alert*



*Fussing or crying*

### **Questions?**

Your questions are important. Talk with your NICU doctor or nurse if you have questions or concerns.

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit:  
206.598.4606