

6 Sleep and Awake States

Learning about your newborn

This handout for new parents explains a baby's 6 sleep and awake states.

Why should I learn about sleep and awake states?

Knowing your baby's sleep and awake states, and the way your baby moves between states, will help you:

- Know what your baby needs
- Make decisions about what to do and how to respond
- Learn about your baby's temperament
- Respond early to prevent crying later

Here are the 6 main sleep and awake states, and how they look:

Deep Sleep

Signs of deep sleep are:

- Regular, smooth breathing
- Eyes are shut and do not move, no *rapid eye movement* (REM)
- Body is still, with a "startle" every once in a while
- Baby does not respond to stimuli (*habituation*)

Light (REM) Sleep

Signs of light sleep are:

- More responsive and more easily awakened by outside noises and movement
- Irregular breathing: pause, then faster, another pause, then faster
- Eye movement under lids
- Face and body movements
- Baby startles



Knowing your baby's sleep and awake states helps you provide care for your newborn.

Drowsy (Transition Phase)

Signs of drowsiness are:

- Not fully asleep or fully awake
- Wide range of activity, active to quiet
- Tries to reach a more “organized” (controlled) state
- Eyes may flutter open
- Squirming or jerky movements
- Frowning
- May whimper or cry out

Quiet Alert

Signs of a quiet alert state are:

- Bright look, focused eyes, furrowed brow, and “ooh” face
- Most attentive, responsive, smiling
- Moves smoothly and keeps still
- Regular breathing
- Able to interact, process, and learn

Active Alert (Fussyness)

An active alert stage may follow a quiet alert state. Signs of this state are:

- Irregular breathing
- Agitation, fussing, or whimpering
- Much more body activity – writhing or jerky movements
- Tries to organize self, but cannot

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Perinatal Education:
206.598.4003

Maternal and Infant Care
Clinic: 206.598.4070

Crying

During crying, a baby may move around a lot, and then may stop briefly, as if to listen. Different kinds of crying may be your baby’s way of saying that they:

- Want your attention
- Are hungry or need their diaper changed
- Are tense or too stimulated: “I’ve had enough! I’ve reached my limit!”