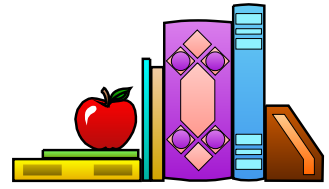


"Gentle" Waking for Sleepy Newborns



"Never wake a sleeping baby" is good advice for a baby who is breastfeeding effectively and growing robustly. However, occasionally parents are faced with a baby who seems too good to be true – these babies seem to want to sleep virtually all the time. Whatever the reason, these little ones would rather sleep than eat. And that's NOT good! Babies need to breastfeed 8 to 12 times a day, with 8 good feeds at minimum.

Sometimes someone will bring her to you with the admonition to "wake her up, it's time for her to eat – it's been over three hours." So you dutifully attempt to wake her – you unwrap, undress, take her diapers off, coo at her, rub her head, tickle her feet, put her to the breast, and then start all over again, trying to get her awake enough to latch on and breastfeed. Perhaps she finally responds, crying, and you put her to your breast, only to have her fall sound asleep again. What an exercise in frustration and futility!

Sleepy babies who are not rooting for the breast simply will not breastfeed. Because of the nature of bottles and the nipples, any caregiver can force a sleepy baby to take a bottle and drink something. But even the best lactation consultant can't make a baby breastfeed if the baby is not ready.

So, what do we do with these kiddos? Try gentle waking – if they aren't eating frequently enough, we need to begin before three or four hours have passed.

1. If you have been trying to wake her every 3 hours or so since you came home from the hospital, and it just isn't working, pick a time to let her sleep until she wakes and nurses on her own. That will be the beginning of her wake/eat cycle.
2. About 2.5 hours after the end of that feeding, strip the baby down to her diaper, and put her skin to skin with you – on your bare chest – in an up and down position with her head near your breast, and her feet on your abdomen. Put a light blanket over the two of you. Usually she will wake and begin to root within 20 to 30 minutes.
 1. If she hasn't started rooting within 30 - 40 minutes, then stimulate her a little bit by talking to her (bring her face close to your face) and rub her back a little bit. Do this for three or four minutes – if she doesn't wake, put her skin to skin again for another 15 or 20 minutes.
 2. The deep sleep/light sleep/wake cycle of the baby seems to be about 60 minutes. In deep sleep, the baby's breathing will be very quiet and regular. In light sleep it is more irregular and noisier, though her eyes will still be closed. When you try and wake a baby from deep sleep, feeds will be ineffective.

This won't last forever – in fact, within a week or so, you'll find that she's waking well on her own and signaling you when she's ready to eat. Until she has regained her birth weight, make sure you keep track of her numbers of feeds, her wet & poopy diapers. (A wet diaper should feel heavy in your hand; the stools should be a "poop you can scoop" – at least a tablespoon or more).