

Build awareness and confidence in how to soothe your baby and help them sleep during the first few weeks after birth. Ritual, rhythm, rest, repeat.

PROGRAM	Pregnancy & Postpartum
TOPIC	Body & Baby
MODULE	Soothing & Sleeping

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# Insights

Babies don't need much during their first few weeks of life. That said, the things that they do require are love, dedication, softness, awareness, and most importantly, routine. Although babies cannot tell time or clearly verbalize what they need, they acclimate to the world outside of your uterus when there is a rhythm and ritual to their 24-hour experience. In those first few weeks, creating a sense of sameness for them, through repeating the soothing techniques and sleep hygiene recommendations in this guide, will help you find a rhythm that works for both of you.

Key Points To Remember

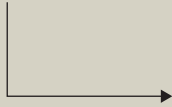
## Takeaways



- Crying is your baby's way of communicating with you; it's not a negative thing. Building up a curious and positive response to their cry, while moving swiftly to identify and meet their needs using The Soothing Circuit, is a practice that will come with time.
- The first 3–4 months are your baby's fourth trimester. Your goal is to help recreate and mimic life in the uterus with constant movement, white noise, and swaddling. Dr. Karp's soothing philosophy and practice, The "5 S's," can be a wonderful tool to help you do just that.
- Learning about normal newborn sleep patterns, setting realistic expectations about sleep, staying nourished and hydrated, and asking for help with newborn care so you can rest are some of the ways to support your own sleep hygiene while adjusting to your new life as a parent.
- You can't "spoil" your baby by offering too much touch or holding during the fourth trimester. You will likely get the benefits of co-regulation, when you and your baby feel more comfortable, by holding your baby or babywearing.

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A Framework For  
Understanding This  
Experience



# Landscape

Prior to birth, your baby was living in a constantly moving and loud sonic environment. For example, every time you took a breath during your pregnancy, your diaphragm, a muscle below your lungs, moved and gently jostled your baby up and down. We take almost 20,000 breaths per day, so your baby was moving a lot. This perspective helps us understand their needs a little more.

Trying to recreate the environment outside of the uterus is the key goal in these first four weeks. One of the easiest ways to do that is to use The “5 S’s,” a method created by Dr. Harvey Karp, pediatrician and founder of Happiest Baby. The “5 S’s” is based on what Dr. Karp learned from studying the soothing practices of the !Kung San peoples, who live mostly on the western edge of the Kalahari desert. He found that through wrapping, rocking, and shushing their babies, they could calm them in minutes. He documented these techniques and developed them into The “5 S’s,” techniques meant to mimic life in the womb for the first 3 to 4 months.<sup>1</sup> I’ve learned so much from Dr. Karp over the years and have used these tips often when teaching new parents and helping soothe their babies. These strategies are covered in the Soothing and Sleeping video and in my audio conversation with Dr. Karp, [In Conversation: Your Baby’s 4th Trimester](#).

## The “5 S’s” Include:

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### SWADDLING

A (surprisingly) tight swaddle helps your baby feel secure, like they did inside the womb. Swaddling will also help decrease the possibility that their “startle” reflex will wake them while sleeping on their backs.

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### SIDE HOLDING

Holding your baby on their side can help prevent their startle reflex. It may also provide some pressure on their abdomen, which can support soothing and regulation for your baby.

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### SHUSHING

Babies love loud white noise because it mimics the sounds they're used to in the womb. You can "shhh" into your baby's ear or try a sound machine.

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### SWINGING

Your baby is used to a life in the womb that's full of movement. Swinging, swaying, and rocking can help soothe your baby. Slower rocking is fine most of the time, but occasionally a stronger and more rhythmic jostle may be needed. Never violently shake your baby.

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### SUCKING

Your baby has a strong need to suck. It can be deeply calming for them. Offering a pacifier or the tip of your finger can be just the thing to calm your baby down.

## Soothing

Here are some things to consider when learning how to soothe your baby:

### THE SOOTHING CIRCUIT

When your baby is unsettled or crying, move through a checklist of possibilities: Wet diaper? Hunger? Gas? Wanting to be held? Then scan your baby for any irritators, like itchy clothing tags, hair wrapped around their toe, or anything that could be pulling or tugging on them. Then implement the "5 S's."

### NEWBORN SLEEP ENVIRONMENT

In addition to the "5 S's," I recommend that parents set up a successful newborn sleep environment,<sup>2</sup> which includes:

- **Light:** Until birth, your baby lived in total darkness. Now, they are learning how to know the difference between day and night. You can use light to help them differentiate. Try keeping your window shades open during the day, when your baby is playing or feeding and keeping your baby's sleep space very dark with black-out curtains when they are sleeping.
- **Temperature:** The room your baby sleeps in should be cool—the safest temperature range is from 68–72 degrees fahrenheit. Moving air from a fan or humidifier (cool mist only) has been shown to decrease the risk of SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome).<sup>3</sup>
- **Sounds:** Low and continuous white noise can promote newborn sleep.

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#### **SLEEP SAFETY & THINGS TO CONSIDER:**

- Where and how your baby sleeps is a very personal decision that often looks different from family to family. Speak with your baby's pediatrician about any questions or concerns you may have about your baby's sleep environment and what their safety recommendations include.
- To ensure the safest sleeping position and decrease the incidence of SIDS, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that infants be placed for sleep in a supine position (fully on the back) until the baby reaches 1 year of age.<sup>3</sup>

#### **SLEEPING PARENT(S)**

Your newborn's natural sleep patterns can have you and your partner (if you're co-parenting) feeling exhausted, to say the least. Unfortunately, lack of sleep can also wreak havoc on your physical and mental wellbeing, leaving you feeling depleted. Here are some things you can do to support your sleep hygiene while adjusting to your new life as a parent:

- **Set realistic expectations:** Knowing what's normal for newborn sleep can help you remain patient while your baby learns to sleep. Having false expectations of your baby sleeping through the night at 4 weeks old will only leave you feeling frustrated and defeated.
- **Go to bed early:** "Sleeping while they baby sleeps" can be hard during the day. If you can sneak in a daytime nap while your baby is sleeping, consider it a win. But don't get down on yourself if you're having a hard time being able to fall asleep during the day. Instead, try going to bed earlier in the evening. Most babies will do a longer stretch of night sleep during the first half of the night, waking more frequently during the second half of the night. If you can get a couple hours of extra sleep earlier in the night, it can help sustain you in the long run.
- **Stay nourished and hydrated:** One side effect of dehydration and hunger can be feelings of lethargy, so make sure you are well-fed and hydrated.
- **Ask for help:** Depending on resources available to you, don't hesitate to ask anyone in your care team (partner, family, friends, postpartum doula, night nurse, etc.) to watch the baby so you can sleep.

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How You Can Take  
Care Of Yourself  
Physically, Emotionally,  
& Spiritually Inside  
Of This Experience



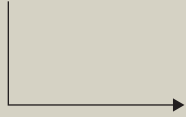
## Self Care

- Caring for a newborn 24/7 can make it easy to put yourself on the backburner. Check in with yourself about basic needs: Do you need to eat? Drink water? Take a shower? Slow down for a sec? Listen to yourself and take care accordingly.
- Try breathing exercises while soothing & feeding your baby. Deep breath in, long exhale out, reminder that you're doing great.
- Co-regulation: You may find that holding your baby, or babywearing, feels regulating for both you and your baby.
- Consider using sensory integration tools to support your nervous system and overall wellbeing. This could look like doing some simple stretching, using a weighted blanket or stress ball, or eating certain foods with a texture or flavor that awaken your senses (think crunchy or sour). Use the [Sensory Integration & The Postpartum Experience](#) guide to explore different strategies.

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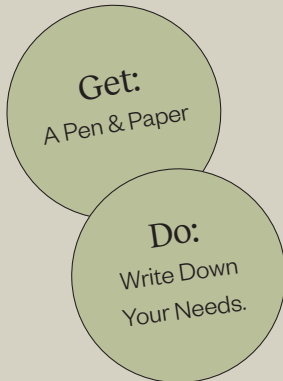
Things You Might  
Need To Feel Prepared  
For This Experience

# Needs



I can find support through...

- Alone time
- Alone (together) time
- Conversation with care provider
- Asking for clarification
- Taking a nap
- Getting to bed early
- A meal
- A snack
- Movement
- Sensory break
- Gadget time



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Resources To Explore, If You  
Want To Keep Learning About  
This Experience

## Deep Dive

*Cribsheet* by Emily Oster

*Safe Infant Sleep* by James J. McKenna, Ph.D.

*The Attachment Parenting Book* by William Sears, M.D., and Martha Sears, R.N.

*The Happiest Baby on the Block* by Harvey Karp, M.D.

*The Happy Sleeper* by Heather Turgeon and Julie Wright

Happiest Baby on the Block Streaming Video ([www.happiestbaby.com/products/baby-streaming-video-english](http://www.happiestbaby.com/products/baby-streaming-video-english))

The American Academy of Pediatrics ([www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org))

Where We Found Our Information  
On This Experience

## References

<sup>1</sup> Karp, H., M.D. (2015). *The happiest baby on the block: The new way to calm crying and help your newborn baby sleep longer*. New York: Bantam Books.

<sup>2</sup> Turgeon, H., & Wright, J. (2015). *The happy sleeper: The science-backed guide to helping your baby get a good night's sleep - newborn to school age*. Brunswick, Victoria: Scribe Publications.

<sup>3</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. (2017, January 12). Reduce the Risk of SIDS & Suffocation. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/Preventing-SIDS.aspx>