

MOM TALK

Life

St George's Hospital

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Can you help your baby sleep through the night?

TANYA WYATT

FORTUNATELY, the answer to this question is a resounding "Yes!" (I see sleep-deprived parents prick up their ears).

Waking during the night can be caused by a number of things, but one of the most common and easily remedied is low blood-sugar levels (resulting from an initial blood-sugar spike).

Mainstream advice seems to be to offer your child/baby a carbohydrate-rich diet, especially high in baby cereals and rice. This is a problem for children because – until they are between the ages of 12-36 months – they cannot produce the digestive enzymes required to deal with starchy carbohydrates, so eating these foods causes their little digestive systems a lot of stress and can lead to ongoing future gut issues.

It also causes blood-sugar problems (which can ultimately, in the worst-case scenario, lead to diabetes). Every meal should, instead, be high in good-quality proteins and fats, and should also include vegetables.

When diets are high in starchy carbs, blood-sugar levels rise dramatically, leading to insulin production and then a resulting fall in blood sugar and ultimately, an increase in adrenalin (This hormone is responsible for picking blood sugar levels back up again).

Think of how you feel when your adrenalin is flowing... hyper-alert and ready to "take flight or fight". This adrenalin surge is what can waken your baby during the night and can lead to ongoing restlessness.

Other things you can do to ensure a good night's sleep are:

1. Black out your baby's room, so that you cannot see your hand in front of your face (This ensures that cortisol levels remain low, thus allowing melatonin – the "sleep" hormone – to rise).

2. In the 90 minutes prior to bedtime, make sure your baby is not exposed to overhead lighting... use lamps and dimmers, or candlelight (again, this brings cortisol levels down, allowing melatonin to rise naturally).

• Tanya Wyatt is an author of two internationally-released health and fitness books and is also a nutrition and lifestyle coach. She recently returned to Port Elizabeth from London, where (for the past five years) she and her partner have been running The Happy Body Company – an exercise, nutrition and lifestyle coaching practice in central London. The focus of their work centres on helping clients achieve excellence in health by means of positive nutritional, energetic, emotional, exercise and lifestyle changes.

She is on the Advisory Board of *Shape* magazine, in which she is also a monthly columnist. She is also a mom.

Wyatt's work is not mainstream. She was trained by both the Corrective Holistic Exercise Kinesiology Institute and Health-excel – both American-founded institutes in the UK. The thrust of her work centres around optimal hormonal health and true organ balance through the use of traditional, nutritional and lifestyle practices.

She covers issues such as restless sleeping, short attention span, eating problems, skin conditions, optimal brain and nervous system development, constipation and toxicity prevention, as well as general health promotion.