

## Guidance For Parents Of The Four Month Old

### **Feeding**

At 4 months of age, human milk or formula remains the best food for babies. Most babies will be ready to start solids by about 6 months of age. Throughout the first year, continue to breast feed or use an iron-fortified formula. Never put your baby to bed with a bottle as this practice increases the risk of dental caries. Never warm bottles or jars of baby food in a microwave oven. This practice can create hot pockets of fluid/food, which will burn your baby.

### **Bowel Movements**

Over time babies' bowel habits may change. Some babies will continue to have several bowel movements per day while others stool only once every 5-6 days. Both situations are normal. If your baby's stools contain hard balls or pellets or there is blood on the surface of the stool, make an appointment to discuss constipation.

### **Sleep**

Continue to place your baby on his back to sleep to reduce the risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). The AAP's most recent recommendation regarding SIDS is to keep your baby in a crib in your room until 6-12 months of age. This recommendation is based on data which shows that the rate of SIDS is decreased by 50% when a baby sleeps in a crib in a parents room. The average baby begins rolling over between 4 and 5 months of age. It is neither practical nor necessary to repeatedly return babies to their backs during the middle of the night. It is important that your baby have some time on his belly when he is awake to allow him to gain upper body strength and prevent his head from flattening in the back. To be safe, the slats on your crib should be less than or equal to 2 7/8 inches apart. Do not use soft bedding such as quilts, pillows, and blankets, and do not place stuffed toys in the crib as they may increase the risk of suffocation.

**Helping You Baby Sleep Thru The Night:** By four months of age, about 90% of babies can sleep more than eight consecutive hours without feeding. All children, especially during the first year of life, may awaken several times each night following dreams, but most can put themselves back to sleep. The ones that have not learned to do this cry for a parent. If you provide too much attention (constant rocking, for example), the infant becomes dependent on you for returning to sleep. These babies are called "**trained night criers**". Infants who demand to be fed as well as held are "**trained night feeders**". After 6 months of age, the normal separation fears of many infants are accentuated at bedtime and during the night. These children become "**fearful night criers**".

**Trained night criers:** If your baby does not awaken for food, but still cries at night respond briefly, or not at all. Crying is not harmful, and infants cannot get over this problem without some crying. Wait at least five minutes before going into the room, don't stay longer than a minute, act sleepy, whisper "shh, everyone's sleeping", give a few gentle pats. Do not remove him from the crib or turn on the lights. Most young infants will cry 30 to 60 minutes and then fall back to sleep. If the crying persists, you may check your baby every 15-20 minutes for one minute or less.

**Trained Night Feeders:** Increase daytime feeding intervals to four hours or more. Nighttime feeding intervals cannot be lengthened if daytime intervals remain short. Gradually postpone feedings to accomplish a 4-hour stretch. Your goal is 5 meals per day by 4 months and 4 meals per day by 6 months of age. Discontinue any bottle in the crib immediately. Phase out nighttime feedings. For bottle fed babies, the amount can be decreased by one ounce every few nights until your baby no longer craves food at night. For breast fed babies, nurse him on just one side.

**Fearful night criers:** If your child sounds fearful, panics when you leave, cries until he vomits or by past experience will cry nonstop for hours, go in immediately and reassure him. Stay as long as it takes to calm him down, but don't lift him out of the crib. At most, sit in a chair next to the crib with your hand on his body. Don't talk much and leave the lights off. Leave for a few minutes every now and then to teach your child that separation is tolerable. Do the same thing at nap time and bedtime. To reduce separation fears, use a night-light and leave the bedroom door open.

For all sleep problems the following measures should be helpful. Place your baby in the crib awake at bedtime at all nap times. If your baby goes to sleep in your arms occasionally that is fine. But his last memory should be of the crib, not of you or the bottle. If the baby sleeps in your room, move the crib to another room. Babies are noisy sleepers – you don't want to be awakened by his normal tossing and turning. Eliminate long daytime naps. If your baby has napped for more than three hours, awaken him. If he is in the habit of taking three naps per day, try to convert him to two. Do not change diapers during the night. Babies can survive until morning with a wet diaper. The diaper can be changed if it is soiled, although in the absence of nighttime feeding nighttime soiling is uncommon. If you're looking for more guidance with sleep, we recommend "**Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child**", by Mark Weissbluth.

### **Prevention of Illness and Fever**

Signs of illness to watch for include failure to eat, vomiting, unusual irritability, lethargy, and fever. You should have a digital thermometer (the tympanic, or ear, thermometers do not work with infants). If your baby shows any of the above symptoms take a rectal temperature. A temperature of 100.4 or greater is a **fever**. If your baby has a fever call the office for an appointment.

### **Safety**

Until your baby is two years of age OR weighs 30 pounds he requires a **car seat** rear facing and in the back seat when riding in a car which provides a 5 point harness. Never place a baby in a front seat with a passenger airbag. To prevent burns turn the thermostat on your **water heater down to 120 degrees** Fahrenheit. Keep hot liquids (coffee, soup) away from your baby and turn pot handles toward the back of the stove. When outside, keep baby out of direct sunlight. Sunscreen should be used routinely starting at 4 months of age. Use a brimmed hat, sunglasses and an umbrella to provide shade from the sun. Install in your home and check on a regular basis both **smoke and carbon monoxide detectors**. For your baby's sake, keep your home and car free of tobacco smoke. **Never shake your baby** – this can cause permanent neurological damage. Never leave your baby alone with young siblings or pets. Never leave your baby alone in a tub or high places. When on the changing table, always

keep a hand on your baby. Keep small objects and plastic bags out of your baby's reach as they pose choking hazards to your baby. Baby **walkers** are dangerous. Babies sustain broken bones and severe brain injuries by falling down steps or flipping over door jams. Stationary walkers (such as an Exersaucer®) are safe for babies beginning at 4-5 months or age.

For more information about child health, safety and parenting visit the American Academy of Pediatrics' web site @ [WWW.AAP.ORG](http://WWW.AAP.ORG)