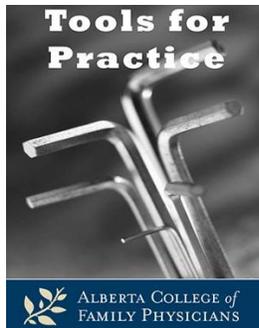


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## Infant Sleep Training—Rest Easy?

**Clinical Question: What is the evidence for infant sleep training?**

**Bottom Line: Sleep training improves infant sleep problems, with about 1 in 4 to 1 in 10 benefitting over no sleep training, with no adverse effects reported after five years. Maternal mood scales also significantly improve, with patients having worse baseline depression scores benefitting most.**

### Evidence:

- Sleep training, or “controlled crying,” is where parents respond to their infant’s cry at increasing time intervals to allow independent settling.
- Six week Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) of 235 infants, mean age seven months, with  $\geq 2$  awakenings/night on  $\geq 5$  nights/week:<sup>1</sup>
  - Sleep training versus safety education. Statistically significant reductions in:
    - Parental report severe infant sleep problems: 4% versus 14%, Number Needed to Treat (NNT)=10.
    - Number of infants with  $\geq 2$  diary-recorded awakenings per night: 31% versus 60%, NNT=4.
    - And improved parent fatigue, sleep quality, and mood scales.
  - Cluster RCT, 328 families reporting infant sleep problem, mean infant age seven months. Tailored sleep intervention including sleep training versus usual care.<sup>2</sup>

Intervention group:

    - At 10 months:
      - Significant reduction in maternal report of infant sleep problems: 56% versus 68%, NNT=9.
      - Non-significant reduction in mothers with depression (Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale  $>9$ ): 28% versus 35%.
        - Those with baseline score  $>9$  had significant numerical improvement in depression scale (subgroup analysis).
    - At two years:
      - Reduced reporting depression symptoms:<sup>3</sup> 15% versus 26%, NNT=9.
    - At five years: No difference in any of 20 outcomes including:<sup>4</sup>

- Child behaviour, relationships, and maternal mental health.
- Recent smaller studies<sup>5,6</sup> and systematic reviews<sup>7,8</sup> support sleep training interventions for sleep and improved parent depressive symptoms.<sup>7</sup>

**Context:**

- Infants sleep problems are associated with parental depression,<sup>9,10</sup> psychological distress,<sup>11</sup> and poor general health.<sup>11</sup>
- Increased infant sleep is associated with easy temperament, adaptability, and low distractibility.<sup>12</sup>
- Complete extinction (allowing baby to “cry it out”) has been demonstrated to be similarly effective, although parents tend to find this method more stressful.<sup>7</sup>
- Sleep training is simple and can be introduced at six months. Examples include leaving the room and not returning for 2-5 minutes before responding to crying, then lengthening that interval.

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**Disclosure:**

Authors do not have any conflicts of interest to declare.

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