

Baby Knows Best

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I thought I knew everything there was to know about babies. I got good grades in medical school, and passed the exams to become a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics. In the last two decades, however, research has come along to refute some of those "facts" I learned, and replace them with "some babies take longer to adjust to the rhythm of the household than other." We were taught that parents should make an effort to help the baby sleep through the night.

Old wives' tale, (old medical school teaching): "Gradually give the baby less and less milk at the 2 a.m. feeding and baby will soon be sleeping through the night." Wrong. If a baby needs eight ounces of milk in the middle of the night, the baby will not let you cheat him with six.

OWT: "Give solid foods early, so the baby can sleep through the night sooner." Wrong. Early feeding of solids makes no difference, and might make things worse. Babies sleep through the night when they are ready to sleep through the night. Giving the baby solid foods in the first few months when the gut is unable to digest anything more than human milk often allows a food sensitivity to develop which the baby may never outgrow.

OWT: "Feed the baby every four hours and develop a good habit pattern." Wrong. Babies can empty their stomachs in 1-1/2 to two hours. They grow fast. If they continue to grow as they do in those first few weeks, they will be 22 feet tall at age 10 years.

Feed when hungry. Breast milk is low in fat and protein so is low in sustainability. This suggests that human mothers (parents) should carry their babies with or on them constantly for the first few months. The babies like and need this also.

OWT: "Don't pick him up so much. You will spoil him." Wrong. If babies are responded to quickly in those first few weeks, they cry for shorter times later. Ninety-six percent of habitual finger suckers have been left to fall asleep alone after feedings when they were smaller. Putting babies on a rigid schedule may produce just what you are trying to prevent -- a nervous, anxious, and insecure child.

Many of these new wives' tales have come from a book coming out in August 1992, *Crying Baby, Sleepless Nights*, by Sandy Jones, Harvard Common Press, Boston, MA.

It all seems so logical and sensible, and tells us what we have always suspected, but needed the authoritative research to make us sure of our ground: Babies need mothers who will feed, cuddle, hold, love, and sing. Ms. Jones points out, "How terrible it is to be a baby totally dependent upon another human being who ignores pleas for help."

My only criticism I could muster up about this book is that she did not suggest a chiropractic examination of the baby in that first week or two of life.

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JUNE 1992