



Teething and Sleep

Teething and sleep—now THIS is a popular topic. So here's some background information: by age 2, a baby will grow approximately 20 new teeth. Yikes! So if teething babies never sleep, then I guess that means you're not sleeping for the first 2 years of your baby's life, right?

Not so much. Here's the good news: teeth typically get WAY more credit than they deserve. Teething pain usually only lasts for **a few days** at a time. It's definitely painful when a tooth is about to pop in, but this pain doesn't last for weeks or months on end and likely isn't the only reason why your baby isn't sleeping through the night. Another piece of good news is that certain teeth often come in at the same time. So you might have a rough 48 hours, but then voila! Three new teeth! The third piece of good news is that you can help manage the pain. There are over-the-counter as well as homeopathic remedies for teething that work beautifully, so this is definitely pain that can be managed.

So here's the million dollar question: what effect DOES teething have on sleep? Of course, the answer depends on two important factors:

- 1) Your baby's pain tolerance
- 2) Your baby's sleep habits prior to teething

So let's discuss the first factor: your baby's pain tolerance. It's important to note that all babies have different pain tolerances,

just like adults. Some babies are able to sleep through the night while teething and other babies wake up from the pain. See, I never had any idea when my older daughter was teething. She'd wake up one morning and suddenly have 3 new teeth! When my younger daughter was teething, the whole house knew. Let's just say that Baby Motrin was my best friend during her teething spurts. And regarding your baby's sleep habits prior to teething, I want to emphasize here that if you have a baby who was regularly sleeping through the night and starts teething, he's not going to start waking up every 2 hours because of a tooth. He just won't because his sleep skills will be strong enough to keep his sleep together.

Let me give you an example of what I experienced with my young daughter when she was cutting her first molar when she was 13 months. Here's a bit of background in terms of her sleep: she was sleeping through the night with one feed by 6 months and had dropped that feed by 7.5 months. So by 13 months, she had been sleeping through the night on a regular basis for quite a while.

Anyways, I remember that day that she was cutting her first molar. She was miserable! I put her to bed around 7pm and she woke up at 9pm screaming. I could tell she was in pain. I offered her some Motrin, she went right back to sleep, and she slept straight through until 5:30am, when the meds presumably wore off. I offered her another dose of Motrin at the time, but she didn't go back to sleep afterwards.

Now, it was definitely annoying and inconvenient to be starting my day at 5:30am. But considering she was cutting her first molar and was clearly not herself, her night wasn't bad!

See, I hear parents talking about how their baby wakes up 5 times a night because of teething, but the reality is that this baby was still waking 3 times before this tooth began cutting in. This brings me back to one of my original points about how teething often

receives way too much credit. If your baby's sleep is already not so great to begin with, teething is just going to make things worse. However, if your baby's sleep was solid to begin with, a tooth likely won't wreak havoc on your baby's sleep. The only exception to this are those 2 year old molars. Gosh, when my kids were each cutting their 2 year old molars, I was convinced the universe was punishing me for some grave sin I had committed. It was a wine before 9am type of phase—let's just put it like that! So if your little one is getting in those molars, pop open that special bottle you've been saving—you're going to need it!

So other than wine, here's my advice for handling teething and sleep:

- Try to manage the pain by offering your baby or toddler medication, teething rings, or a cold washcloth. Offer medication again at nighttime if necessary. And of course, speak to your pediatrician first before offering medication and always follow the package guidelines.
- If your baby wakes up to eat once at night, and the medicine is allowed to be given every 6 hours, try offering him/her pain relief around 6pm so that you can give the baby meds again during her midnight feed to last until the morning
- If your baby no longer eats at nighttime, you can try offering her meds at 5pm and then again around 11 or 12 while she's asleep to preempt the 2am fussy wakeup.
- If you're finding your baby to be extremely fussy during the daytime, I'd strongly recommend **avoiding sleep training at night until the tooth comes in**. Again, this should only take a couple of days!
- And last but not least, **avoid reverting back to old habits, or creating new habits that you don't want to keep when your baby has stopped teething**. Just like when your baby is ill, your baby might need a bit of extra comfort until the meds kick in. But if you've been working hard at teaching your baby to fall asleep without feeding to sleep, don't revert

back to feeding to sleep since that's the exact habit you've been working so hard to break. You want to explore alternative soothing mechanisms if your baby needs it, such as rocking, shushing, patting, cuddling, etc.