

Healthy Start FAQ: Happiest Baby



On March 19, 2015, Dr. Harvey Karp facilitated a webinar centered around methods used to calm crying babies and improve infant sleep, thereby ensuring happier and more rested care takers and minimizing risks of infant neglect and post-partum depression. In his presentation, Dr. Karp also discussed the biology and theory behind why his presented methods, known as the 5 S's, succeed in boosting both infant and maternal wellbeing. The 5 S's stand for swaddling, side/stomach, shushing, swinging, and sucking, each representing an activity used to calm crying infants and to improve sleep.

During the webinar, participants asked some great questions, which have been answered below. In case you or a colleague missed the presentation, you can find a recording [here](#).

Is it ok to swaddle a baby overnight to help them sleep?

Absolutely! A study conducted in Washington DC showed that babies who were swaddled were less likely to be placed on their stomach by their mother, reducing the risk of suffocation or SIDS. Swaddling has also been proven to improve sleep efficacy, especially when paired with white noise. Just be sure to swaddle the baby with the arms tucked downward in order to avoid rolling onto his/her stomach. Additionally, ensure that the baby's arms are swaddled snugly, but that his/her hips are flexed and open easily. Using this correct method of swaddling will allow the baby to flex and move his/her legs, thereby avoiding hip dysplasia.

Is there any age that a baby should stop being swaddled to go to sleep?

At the moment, there's some disagreement around when to stop swaddling a baby. While some experts are of the opinion that swaddling should stop at two months (when a few babies begin to roll over), Dr. Karp believes that two months to four months is when swaddling is most important because it is the peak age of SIDS/suffocation, child abuse and a time when breastfeeding abandonment and postpartum depression is still common (all issues associated with crying babies, exhausted parents and a baby's increasing ability to roll over). When the swaddling is coupled with the use of white noise, the baby feels more peaceful, is less likely to roll over, and is more likely to stay asleep. Once the baby can roll over swaddled with the white noise present, the parent(s) must speak with their doctor to make some decisions regarding how to proceed to ensure safe sleep. Please note that as the parent begins to wean a baby from swaddling, usually around four months of age, they should continue to use the white noise in order to maintain the familiar sleep cue and maximize sleep.

Why are men such excellent calmers, and how can we advertise this to the men in our communities?

Men are particularly good at swaddling given their spatial relations capabilities. Men also tend to shush a little louder and jiggle the baby than most women. When a baby is crying, a certain threshold of jiggle and shush need to be reached in order to turn on the calming reflex and disrupt the crying.

The instructional DVD is available to any family who completes the program, and includes a CD of specially engineered white noises (low-pitched to promote sleep and high-pitched to calm crying). The DVD contains an English and a Spanish track and can be watched multiple times by any participating care taker, which can help to remove the burden from the mother of having to educate and convince other caregivers.



Is shushing really encouraged as an effective method of calming a baby?

Almost every culture around the world uses some sort shushing method to calm babies because this type of sound mimics a baby's experience in the womb. Low-pitched shush sounds are hard-wired into human neurology - adults respond to the rumble of a train or car for the same reasons that babies respond to low-pitched shushing or white noise. A ne realization is that babies are more likely to stay awake and cry because of sensory deprivation than because of sensory overload. With that said, Dr. Karp advises against excessively exposing a baby to sound by placing the white noise on too high a volume or by placing the white noise CD/machine too close to the baby's ears.

Have there been any follow-up studies showing a decrease in post-partum depression after implementing the 5 S's?

No, although Dr. Karp's team is eager to do so. However, there is evidence that the 5 S's reduce crying and improve sleep, and it is widely known that crying and exhaustion are key provocations for post-partum depression. Given this knowledge, it's reasonably likely to assume that by improving sleep and decreasing crying using the 5 S's, the likelihood of experiencing post-partum depression will decrease.

If you have or know somebody who has interest in conducting research, please contact Dr. Karp to discuss collaborating (dr.karp@thehappiestbaby.com).

Where is the DVD of the 5 S's available?

The DVDs/CDs are available via the [Happiest Baby](http://HappiestBaby.com) website or on [Amazon](http://Amazon.com). (Health professionals/organizations can purchase these materials at substantial discounts at [Happiest Baby](http://HappiestBaby.com). For more specific information on how to purchase the DVDs, please reach out to Kelly Nielson, MPH, Director of Education, Happiest Baby Educator Association, at kelly@thehappiestbaby.org).