



YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO

# *Awake Windows*

by Erin Meinel of Lake Country Sleep



## So, what are "awake windows" exactly?

If there was ONE THING I wish I would have known when it came to infant sleep upon becoming a new parent, it was the idea of "awake windows" - basically, the time from one sleep to another - and the important role these windows play in your child's daily (and nightly) life.

I vividly remember first learning about them from another sleep consultant when I was in the thick of it with my first son, after he was a few weeks old. Did you know a newborn baby can only tolerate about 45 minutes of awake time before needing to sleep again?! I had no idea this was a thing, but I'm so glad I

learned about it when I did, because it saved me from what would have been a crabby, fussy, and overtired baby towards the end of each day, day after day. In fact, having experienced "the witching hour" with him those first few weeks led me to learn all about newborn and infant sleep. Now, here I am today, working to educate and help other exhausted parents overcome their child's sleep problems.

I hope you find the information in this guide valuable and applicable. If you have questions about anything, you can always find me on social media or on my website.



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## Average Awake Window by Age

AGE	TIME AWAKE	TOTAL HOURS OF SLEEP PER DAY
Birth - 6 weeks	45-60 minutes	15-18 hours
6-16 weeks	1-1.5 hours	12-16 hours
4-5 months	2 hours	12-15 hours
6-7 months	2.5 hours	12-15 hours
8-10 months	3 hours	12-14 hours
11-12 months	3.5-4 hours	12-14 hours
13 months - 3 years	4.5-5.5 hours	12-14 hours



It may take some tweaking and adjusting here and there for your child, because these are just averages based on age. You might find that your baby is spot on with these recommendations, or that they can handle a bit less or a bit more time between sleeps. You will have to play around with these times and see what works best for your baby. I recommend really paying attention to awake windows until your baby ends up doing only two naps per day, somewhere around 6-9 months. Then, at that point, you can have them on a set schedule, with two naps occurring at the same times each day.





## Riding the Waves of Sleep

I've found that if I get my baby's timing juuuuust right, I can lay him down awake, and he will go right to sleep, without fussing, within a few minutes. Once you've learned what works best for your baby, you might find they coo themselves right to sleep! Other times, when I've missed the window, he may fuss for a few minutes before falling asleep, and this is also normal. You'll know you've timed it right if your little one is falling asleep within 5-10 minutes of being laid down.

Let's talk about the science behind this idea - I like to think of these awake windows as waves that occur as we go throughout

our day. Your baby builds up sleep pressure over time, and eventually, they need to sleep to remove some of this pressure. When too much of this pressure builds up, it causes our babies' brains to have a flight or fight response. The brain thinks that because sleep did not occur when it was appropriate, there must be some *need* for it to stay awake, so it enters this responsive state to fight the sleepiness. When this happens, the hormone cortisol is released, giving your child a wave of energy to stay awake. In newborns and infants, this can look a lot like colic and extreme fussiness. In toddlers and young children, it looks like hyperactive and manic behavior. This bio-

"In my opinion, healthy parental attachment allows for a child to explore the world around them while simultaneously knowing there is a safe and loving space for them to come back to whenever they need it - their parents' arms."

logical response also makes it extremely difficult to settle down and actually fall asleep. We refer to this as over-tiredness, and to avoid it, we really need to pay attention to these windows.

Think of each awake and sleep interval as one "wave." The wave builds over time (sleep pressure), and when the wave reaches its highest point (the amount of awake time your baby can handle) you want to lay them down to sleep before it crashes. If you wait too long, the wave crashes down and your baby experiences that spike in cortisol and is now fighting to stay awake.

In newborns and young infants especially, you will want to pay attention to what I refer to as "sleepy cues" to help you figure out your child's appropriate awake window. Common pre-tired cues include red eyebrows and staring off - if you notice these occurring, you should lay your baby down with the hope that they will seamlessly drift off into sleep. If you notice your baby yawns or is averting stimuli, they are showing you that they are tired and need a nap now. If they're to the point that they are fussing or are rigid and arching their little body,

they've likely reached over-tiredness. It will be much harder to lay them down at this point successfully without it being a struggle. Perpetual overtiredness can lead to night wakings, early mornings, and short naps.

## Sleepy Cues

Make sure your baby is fed and has a fresh diaper. As your baby is approaching their maximum awake time, these are signs you should be watching for:



### PRE-TIRED

Staring off, not focused  
Reddening eyebrows



### TIRED

Yawning  
Averting stimuli



### OVERTIRED

Rigidity  
Arching back  
Fussiness or crying



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# How to Stretch Awake Windows

Using the chart on page 3 will help you know when it is about time to stretch your child's awake windows. Many parents find it challenging to do this, and feel that they are withholding sleep from their child. This is not really the case, as we are simply shifting where the sleep happens throughout the day. I recommend to do it gently, and slowly, increasing by a few minutes each day. As the awake windows increase, the sleep will consolidate more. As your baby matures, instead of 4-5 shorter naps as a newborn, they will move towards 3 or 2 longer ones as an infant, and finally one very long one right in the middle of the day as they enter toddlerhood.

So, what can you do to help your baby make the transition to a longer awake window? Well, for starters, it needs to be engaging! We don't want you to push your baby so far that they are getting fussy. A few of my favorite ideas:

- blow bubbles
- have a dance party
- follow the dog or cat around
- go outside for just a few minutes
- take a bath
- play with their favorite toy
- sing a song or do a finger play
- tickle
- if on solids, have a bit of a snack - food is sure to keep your little one busy

There you have it, folks! I hope you found this guide to be enlightening and helpful. My website, [www.lakecountrysleep.com](http://www.lakecountrysleep.com), is jam packed with tons of informative blog posts, and make sure to follow along on social media platforms where I share tons of free tips and tricks. If you know someone who may also benefit, please share my information! Let's get those little ones sleeping!

xoxo,

Erin Meinel



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