Baby cues: tired

This is a transcript of the Raising Children Network video available at https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/behaviour/crying/baby-cues.

**Narrator:** As a newborn, your baby might often have a feed and then go straight off to sleep without any wake time in between. As your baby gets older and stays awake for longer, it might be harder to tell when it’s nap time, but, if you can pick up on your baby’s tired cues and get her into bed before she gets overtired, it can make a big difference. With many babies, by the time they’re crying, they’re already overtired. This can make it harder to get them to sleep. Sleeping is a skill that babies have to learn and, like any new skill, it’s harder to do when you’re overtired.

Here are some cues that can tell you it’s nap time for babies under three months:

- Staring into the distance.
- Jerky movements of arms or legs.
- Arching back.

You might also see these signs, especially as babies get older:

- Eye rubbing or yawning.
- Fussing or whining which keeps getting louder.
- Clenched fists.
- Frowning.
- Sucking on fingers.
- Grizzling.
- Not letting you distract them.
- Losing interest in people and toys.

Babies might do lots of these things at once or you might notice they happen in a sequence.

Now let’s see what these tired cues look like in real babies. [video shows babies demonstrating tired signs]

**Mum, talking to baby:** ...a dog along the way. What do you think I heard it say? Bow wow, bow wow, bow wow.

**Mum 2, talking to baby:** What’s the matter?

**Narrator:** Some experts suggest looking out for the end of happy wake time. This is when your baby starts to fuss after being happily awake for a while. This is a good time
to try popping her into bed for a nap. If baby gets overtired and hard to settle, try reducing stimulation by making the room dark and quiet. In this situation, it’s okay to do whatever it takes to help baby settle – a feed, rocking or patting, or a drive in the car – then next time, you can try to get baby down for nap before he’s overtired.

Sometimes overtired babies get into a cycle of having a short feed then falling asleep but waking again a little while later for another feed because they’re still hungry. Another short feed and another short nap leaves you both feeling exhausted. To prevent this cycle, avoid feeding your baby to sleep and use his tired signs to get him into bed before overtiredness strikes. Keeping a baby up all day won’t help her sleep longer at night.