

# Sleeping Better in Pregnancy





# Introduction



It's a weird feeling.  
I know things are  
going to change, but  
I don't know how  
they're going to  
change. Even with all  
the information out  
there, it's all so new.

— HOLLY (31)

Having a baby is one of life's most amazing events. While being pregnant is a special time, it's also a time of enormous change. Your body is changing quickly and you may find you are thinking and sleeping differently, too. You may be experiencing a dozen different emotions on a daily or even an hourly basis: you may be feeling uncertain or anxious, excited or relaxed. Pregnancy is different for everyone, and how your body and mind adjust is unique to you.

Your healthcare provider, pregnancy books and trusted websites can guide you through what is happening to your body, how your baby is growing, what you should eat, how you should exercise. But it is difficult to get helpful, accurate information on sleep in pregnancy. This is mainly because sleep health research is a relatively new topic. Only recently have we become aware of how much sleep affects every aspect of our physical and mental wellbeing.

Research on sleep health in pregnancy is an even newer field, probably because there has been so much focus on mothers' sleep once the baby has arrived. Recent research has shown how crucial it is to get healthy sleep while pregnant, but this can be difficult. The huge changes in your body impact your sleep, and nearly all women will experience

sleep disruption of some kind. But if you are able to manage your sleep well over the next few months, the immediate and long-term benefits for both you and your baby can be substantial.

That's how we want to help you with this book. We'll give you the most current information on sleep changes you can expect while pregnant. Being prepared for a range of possibilities can help you develop realistic expectations about your sleep in the next few months. There will be some challenges in meeting your sleep needs while your body is busy growing your baby, but the ideas and information in the following pages will hopefully assist you in making the most of your sleep opportunities, so you can stay well and enjoy this special time.

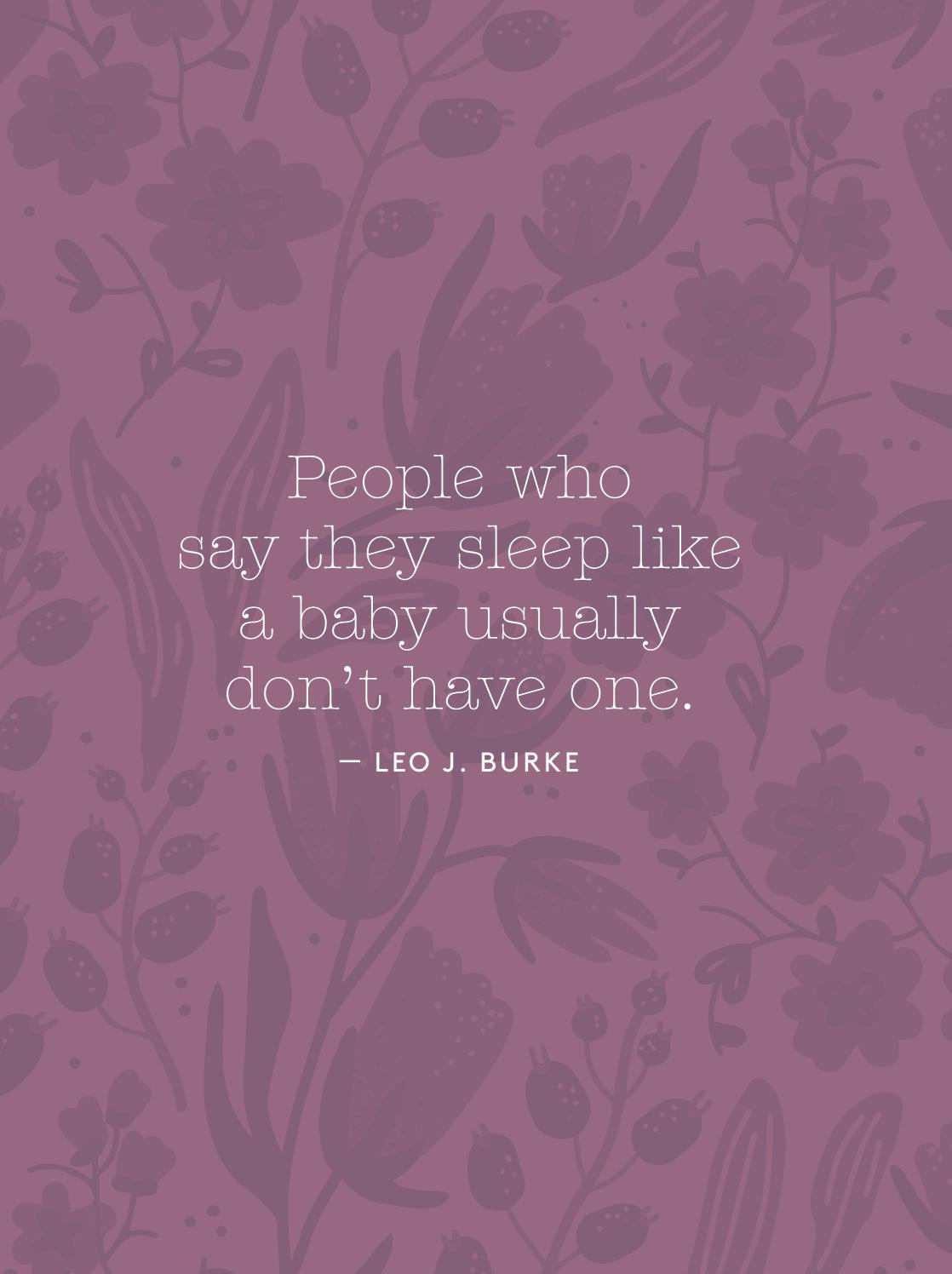
This book is divided into five sections. The first section describes why sleep is important and how it works. The second section explains some overall sleep strategies to help you with your sleep throughout pregnancy; and the next three sections look at sleep strategies during the three trimesters of pregnancy. You might notice that there is some repetition in these trimester sections. This is because some sleep changes occur in more than one trimester, and other changes are more trimester-specific. This repetition is intentional so that you can pick the book up at any time in your pregnancy and read about the sleep for that trimester.





A close-up photograph of a person's arm and hand resting on a dark blue, textured pillow. The person is wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt. The hand is positioned with the fingers slightly spread, resting on the pillow. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# Sleep Essentials



People who  
say they sleep like  
a baby usually  
don't have one.

— LEO J. BURKE

## WHY IS SLEEP IMPORTANT?

Sleep is an essential part of healthy living and is just as important as eating, drinking and breathing. When we have healthy sleep we feel, think and perform better. This is because sleep gives our bodies time to rest, restore, grow and strengthen. Sleep allows our bodies to maintain a strong immune system to fight off illness and avoid diseases. It allows our brains to create and store memories and complete tasks quickly and accurately. Having better sleep also improves creativity and assists in regulating appetite.

Importantly, sleep plays a big part in balancing our emotions. As you may already know and feel, your pregnant body is incredibly busy. Work, family, friends and community commitments can also be demanding. With so much happening at this time in your life, it's easy for your mind to feel overactive and unsettled. The Australian Sleep Health Foundation says that sleep is 'a built-in biological source of resilience and the ability to bounce back'. Healthy sleep is a precious tool to help manage the demands of a busy life, stabilising how you feel. That's why it's essential to prioritise sleep, now more than any other time in your life.

## WHY DO WE SLEEP?

After years of research, scientists still have different ideas as to why humans sleep. Four theories are listed here. The reasons why we sleep are most likely a combination of all of these.

<b>Preservation</b>	This is an early sleep theory that suggests simply that animals will find a safe place to sleep, hidden out of the way of predators.
<b>Conservation</b>	Another early theory that proposes the body has a break while we're asleep to let the batteries recharge.
<b>Restoration</b>	A theory that sleep allows the body time to restore: muscle growth, tissue repair and immune function renewal all happen while we sleep, and toxins created by the brain while we're awake are removed during sleep.
<b>Processing and learning</b>	This is a more recent theory that suggests sleeping gives the brain a break from outside stimulation so it has a chance to review the day's activities and process the information. This helps consolidate memories, which allows us to better retain and retrieve information in the future.

# Healthy sleep

♥ balances emotions

♥ consolidates memories

♥ sharpens reactions

♥ restores energy levels

♥ supports clearer thinking

♥ strengthens the immune system

♥ controls food cravings

♥ improves creativity

## Lack of sleep

leads to  
weight  
gain

increases  
risk of  
diseases

leads to  
irritability and  
impulsiveness

increases  
poor judgement  
and coordination

worsens  
mood

increases  
risk of  
accidents

reduces  
concentration

leads to  
short-term  
memory loss

## WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T SLEEP WELL?

Poor sleep arises from getting too little sleep, disrupted sleep, sleeping at the wrong time, or a combination of all three. When our sleep is poor, we don't just miss out on the enormous benefits of healthy sleep; we can be affected by a range of negative consequences. It seems that some of these could affect your pregnancy, birth experience and your baby.

### Acute sleep disruption/deprivation

If we don't get enough sleep, or we wake up a lot during the night, we experience sleep disruption. If we have just one or two nights of poor sleep, the sleep deprivation is acute (short-term) and we can experience a lack of focus, bad mood, sleepiness, headaches, or we can't remember or do things as well as usual. We can normally recover from acute sleep deprivation with a minimum of two good nights' sleep; however, it can take even longer to get back to performing at an optimal level.

24 hours of being constantly awake can result in the same level of impairment as a blood-alcohol concentration of 0.10%.

(Williamson & Feyer, 2000)

### Chronic sleep disruption/deprivation

When poor sleep extends into a few nights, sleep disruption becomes chronic (long-term) and the consequences can be more severe. As well as experiencing the symptoms above, long-term sleep disruption increases the risk of accidents, disease and disorders, and lowers our life expectancy. How sleepy we feel does not always reflect our actual level of sleep deprivation. Even though we think we are coping well, our health may still be affected.

## How is sleep related to hunger, accidents and mental health?

Hunger	Are you hungrier when you're tired? Lack of sleep alters the release of hunger hormones, making the brain think we're hungry. Additionally, being tired means we might not have the energy to prepare and cook healthy meals; instead we might opt for a quick, high-calorie, processed option.
Accidents	Sleep deprivation decreases reaction time, concentration and the ability to make good decisions. This is because the area of the brain that is responsible for reasoning and judgement is vulnerable to poor sleep. This is especially relevant when we are doing activities where these skills are important, such as driving or doing complex work tasks.
Mental health	Sleep and depression share a bidirectional relationship: poor sleep increases the risk of poor mental health, and poor mental health increases the risk of having poor sleep. This is especially relevant if you have had mental health difficulties in the past. Improving sleep may help break this negative cycle.