

# Study: Working from home improves baby sleep

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As the world transitions from pandemic lockdowns, pediatric sleep experts have found some pluses of working from home, including more sleep for babies and less daytime drowsiness for parents.

On the downside, a new study led by Flinders University published in *Sleep Medicine* warns that the COVID-19 pandemic also introduced some [negative consequences](#) for families and young [infants](#)—including more [screen time](#) for babies and increased depressive symptoms in their parents. The study sample included 1,518 US infants aged 1–18 months.

To measure changes in the infants and their parents lived through the US lockdowns, researchers used cutting-edge auto video-somnography technology to collect objective sleep metrics, and online questionnaires completed by parents.

They compared infant sleep and digital media screen exposure habits in late 2019 to data collected a year later in November-December 2020.

For infants, night-time sleep duration increased, but so did screen exposure time. For parents of infants, daytime sleepiness decreased, yet mild increases in depressive symptoms occurred.

The study, led by Flinders University researcher Dr. Michal Kahn and Professor of Child Psychology Michael Gradisar, measured these changes during the COVID-19 year:

- Infants had 40 mins more objectively measured sleep per night
- Older infants had an additional 18 mins of screen time per day
- Parents reported less [daytime sleepiness](#) but more depression during COVID-19.

As a reference for future lockdowns and pandemic conditions, Dr. Kahn says the study highlights the need to raise awareness to reduce infant screen-time and the daytime stresses on the mental health of parents.

"Applying harm reduction strategies, such as encouraging parents to choose adequate digital media content, incorporate movement while

using screens, and prioritize screen-free times may be an appropriate pragmatic approach," she says.

"Similarly, effective measures to access psychological support and treatment programs could help mitigate the effects of living restrictions on parents' [depressive symptoms](#)—particularly in the event of further COVID-19 waves, or future pandemics."

In spite of the negatives, the researchers say the increases in infant sleep duration and decrease in parent sleepiness suggest that these conditions may also have substantial benefits.

"Extending some of these conditions, such as allowing parents to work from home, should be considered within the efforts to improve the well-being of [parents](#) and infants as they transition to post-pandemic times," the research concludes.

The article, "COVID-19 babies: auto-videosomnography and parent reports of infant sleep, screen time, and parent well-being in 2019 vs 2020" (24 July 2021) by Michal Kahn, Natalie Barnett, Assaf Glazer and Michael Gradisar has been published in *Sleep Medicine*

**More information:** Michal Kahn et al, COVID-19 babies: auto-videosomnography and parent reports of infant sleep, screen time, and parent well-being in 2019 vs 2020, *Sleep Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.sleep.2021.07.033](#)

Provided by Flinders University

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