

Are you used to eight hours' sleep, a bath when you get up and watching *EastEnders* uninterrupted? If so, you're in for a shock! By Jane Yettram.

a hard

adjusting to life with a newborn around is never easy. The early weeks can take you by surprise, even if it's your second time around. Because just as no two births are the same, no two babies are either. One word sums up life with a new baby – chaos. A newborn has no concept of day or night, or meal-times. You are your new baby's life – that's 24 hours a day, with no time off for good behaviour.

It's easy to be thrown into turmoil by the random waking, feeding, crying and periods of contentment which make up a new baby's life. But this is normal. Crying, feeding, sleeping or being content (often briefly) really are their only states of being at this stage and there's no way you can predict which of the four will be happening at any one time – or how long each of them will last.

We asked two new mothers to keep a record of their baby's activities over a two-day period. The results are very revealing!

Two days old **Helen Taylor, 32, talks about life with baby Rhodri.**

Rhodri's charts reveal that babies do actually sleep quite well for the first 24 or 48 hours of their life – labour is pretty exhausting for them, too, after all. The trouble is, they don't always sleep at night, when you're most desperate for it.

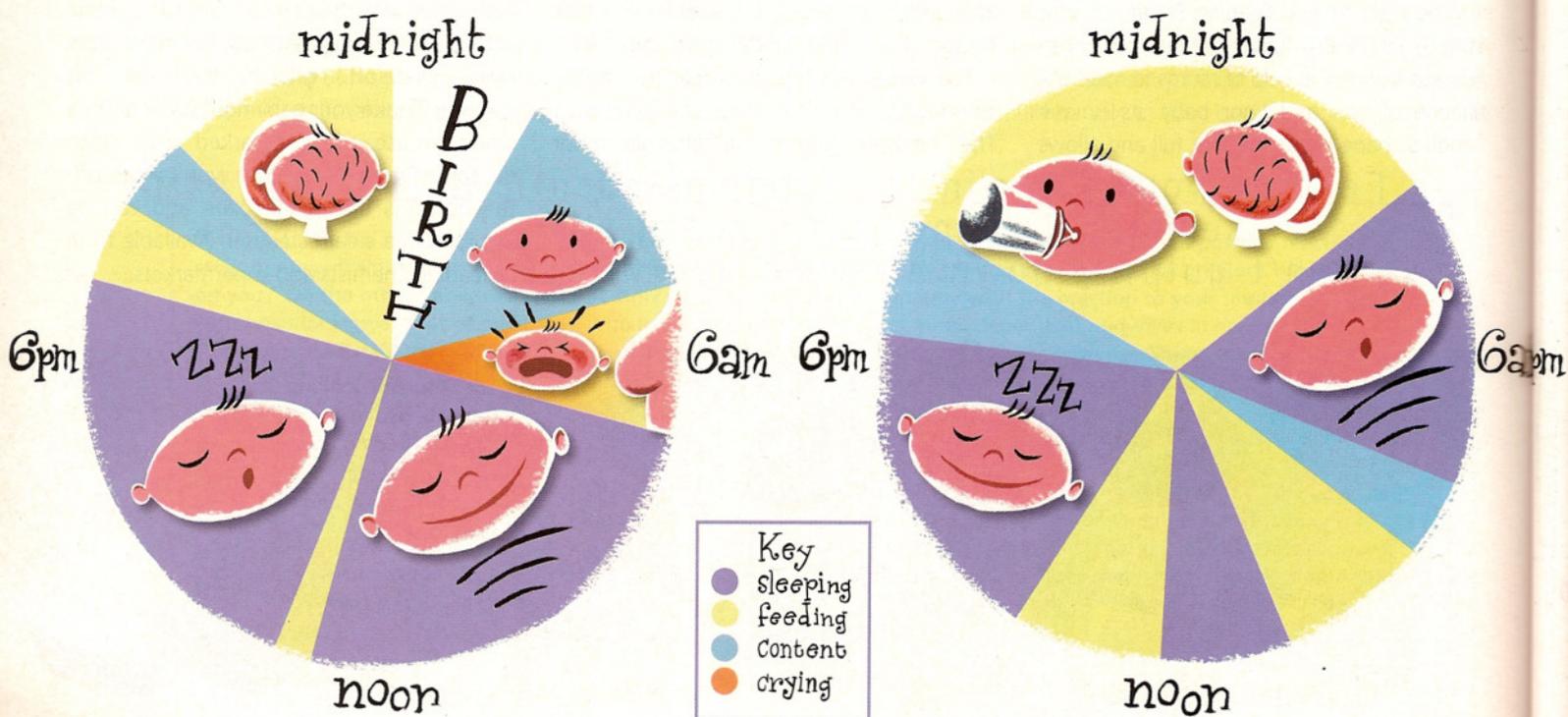
Breastfeeding can take you by surprise, too. Before you have a baby, the information you read in books seems very straightforward – feed every two hours at first, gradually decreasing to every four hours or so. Unfortunately, babies don't read books. They insist on frequent snacks, or gorge themselves for hours, or indulge in a disorientating combination of both.

"It's amazing how often and for how long new babies feed," says Rhodri's mum, Helen. "Half the time I think that he's just

using me as a dummy – he's continually feeding, dozing, feeding, dozing. But if I try to put him down he starts crying. He just seems to want to feed or be cuddled the whole time."

This complete monopolising of your time can come as a real shock. "It's fine at the moment," says Helen, "but I'm starting to worry about what happens when Robert, my husband, goes back to work. How will I get everything done? Rhodri's such a hungry baby. I'm thinking of buying a sling so I can get on with the housework and Rhodri will think he's being cuddled. He's so tiny and vulnerable, I can't bear the thought of having to leave him to cry. It's early days, though. I just hope that his body clock settles down a bit soon."

48 hours in the life of Rhodri (two days old)



Monday's night

Three weeks old Liz Midgley, 37, talks about life with baby Tom.

Even the briefest glance at Tom's charts shows how different he is to Rhodri. He doesn't have the long sleeps babies usually do in their first 48 hours. At three-and-a-half weeks, he is crying more and sleeping in shorter bursts, and his longest content period is 20 minutes. Neither, of course, are any two days alike. In the early hours of Sunday morning, he slept better than he had in the same period the day before. He also had stretches of several hours – which his mother Liz really needs. The problem is, you don't know what the next night will bring.

Liz's older son, Eddie, now two, was very different. "Eddie slept for England," says Liz. "Tom seemed quite placid in the first couple of days – even putting in a six-hour sleep – so I felt very optimistic and relaxed. But the

wakefulness and crying that followed came as shock. He can be inconsolable for ages."

Getting Tom to sleep is a problem – rocking or walking with him works, but pacing around the bedroom in the middle of the night is exhausting. Also, he often wakes the instant Liz puts him down and she'd prefer it if he could fall asleep without help.

With a toddler and a newborn, Liz has little spare time. "The house is a mess," she says. "You can't walk anywhere without tripping over clothes and shoes and toys." But she knows things will get better. "I'd forgotten how awful it can seem at the beginning," she adds. "But the exhaustion and chaos of the early weeks don't last. Hopefully, by six or seven weeks a pattern will emerge – and children are wonderful."

how to cope

- If you can, sleep when the baby sleeps. Or do something for yourself: relax and listen to music, have a bath, watch TV.
- Limit visitors and get them to make you tea.
- Forget housework or delegate it to someone else. If you can afford it, employ a cleaner or someone to do the ironing. And take advantage of home delivery services.
- Stock the freezer with ready-made meals.
- Remind yourself that this initial chaos won't last – babies do settle into some sort of routine – and that you're doing the most vital job in the world.
- Although a newborn can give nothing in return for your 24-hour-a-day attention, at about six weeks, when you get that very special first smile, you'll melt.
- On possible crisis days, like when your partner goes back to work, make sure someone is there to look after you.
- Start good habits early to promote a routine. When feeding at night, keeping the lights off and being quiet will help establish a difference between night and day. ■

48 hours in the life of Tom (three weeks old)

