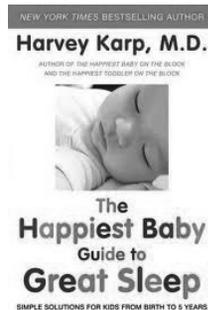


BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEWS

The Happiest Baby Guide to Great Sleep: Simple Solutions for Kids From Birth to 5 Years

Harvey Karp, MD

New York, HarperCollins Publishers (William Morrow Imprint), 2012, 384 pp., \$25.99, Hardcover



Recently a young mother asked what I thought of Dr Harvey Karp's book on infant sleep. All her friends were using it enthusiastically. What advice could I give?

While I had been aware of the *Happiest Baby* phenomenon, and particularly the celebrity acclaim Dr Karp's "5 S" proposal had created, I had dismissed this offering as yet another parenting book unlikely to provide new benefit for my patients. But when parents talk, I need to listen. It was clearly time to learn what tricks Dr Karp might teach this old dog.

The Happiest Baby Guide to Great Sleep provides a roadmap for parents who are struggling with their child's sleep. The book reintroduces and expands on ideas Dr Karp pioneered in his previous works, *The Happiest Baby on the Block* and *The Happiest Toddler on the Block*.

Dr Karp initially provides an excellent lay overview of sleep physiology. The book is then organized to explore sleep problems at different ages. For each stage, Dr Karp discusses normal developmental behaviors that impact sleep. Then he provides stage-specific advice. He debunks common myths. He identifies and supports evidence-based recommendations (back to sleep, immunizations, etc). He boldly wades into controversial topics, like bed sharing, providing balanced facts parents can use to reach independent conclusions. In the last chapters, he explores special situations, such as ADHD, obstructive sleep apnea, and night terrors.

Throughout, Dr Karp uses vignettes to illustrate his methods and successes. Unfortunately, the graphs, diagrams, and charts, used for emphasis, are of poor quality. However, the

book is well indexed so parents can navigate to a particular issue for review.

While this book primarily deals with sleep, it contains much more. Dr Karp does a superb job helping parents understand why difficult but normal childhood behaviors evolve. He encourages parents to develop positive daytime behaviors that reduce sleep issues. To this end, he suggests wonderfully creative strategies including "side-talking," "playing the fool," and "patience stretching." These techniques evolve from well-studied positive reinforcement interventions. They will arm even experienced providers with new arrows in their quiver of parental advice.

Dr Karp's style is informal. Some might find his use of monikers like "your little bug" or "your cave kid" endearing. Others may find this cloying or perhaps condescending. But his messages are clear and frequently reinforced in readily understandable language.

Yet the value of any parent guide lies in its validity and safety. Dr Karp asserts that the basis for infant sleep improvement is to create an environment that mimics the womb. His famous "5 S" interventions (swaddling, sucking, shushing, stomach/side position, and swinging) come from this theory. Primary care physicians will recognize each of the "5 S's" as well known strategies. Dr Karp's genius is to take these and package them into a series of specific steps that parents can faithfully follow.

A recent research article assessed the efficacy of these interventions on infant crying, sleep, and parental stress.¹ This study, limited in part by providing video training only, did not find significant differences when parents used Dr Karp's methods. Unfortunately, there are no evidence-based reviews that critically assess his approaches.

So could Michelle Pfeiffer, Pierce Brosnan, and many others with anecdotally positive experiences, be wrong? Perhaps satisfaction comes from a sense of empowerment in having specific step-by-step directions to follow in difficult situations. Other research suggests that increased parental empowerment is one primary result of his approach.²

Providers should also be aware of some controversial recommendations.

Dr Karp advocates that white noise (shower level) be used throughout the night and at naptime to promote sleep. Unfortunately, there are no current studies that support the safety of long-term white noise in term infants. Because there is ample evidence correlating hearing loss in preterm infants with ambient noise in NICUs, it may be prudent to limit prolonged noise exposure in all children.

Dr Karp advocates waking sleeping infants to feed them at parental bedtime (“dream feed”). In an environment where childhood obesity is rampant, feeding infants and older children who do not exhibit hunger cues should be viewed with extreme caution.

In sum, Dr Karp has provided a book full of many wonderful ideas that will help promote happy parenting. It contains creative positive reinforcement strategies providers can share with parents. For these treats, this dog raises one slightly arthritic paw of approval. However, before blithely recommending this book, providers should understand that there is a lack of scientific evidence about some recommendations and potential harm in others.

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2. Preliminary results of happiest baby on the block retrospective post-test surveys: FY 2009-2010. www.happiestbaby.com/wp-content/uploads/files/THEBE_Univ_AZ_study_2009.pdf. Accessed January 11, 2013.

**In the Shadow of Asclepius:
Poems From American Medicine**

Howard F. Stein

Indianapolis, IN, Dog Ear Publishing, 2011, 97 pp., \$11.95,
Paperback.



In his ninth collection of poems, psychologist Howard Stein, PhD, explores imaginatively the lives of both patients and caregivers in this institutionalized dance we call modern medicine. I come away with a confirmed sense of the stubborn difficulty of day-to-day living

for those who come to us for help, in the face of which the concerns and rituals of us medical folk—from the logistics of office scheduling to the medications we offer for healing—take on an almost surreal quality because they miss the mark so widely. It is a tragic mismatch of expectations that leaves both partners exhausted, physically and emotionally—even spiritually. And yet, what gives Stein’s poems their power is that the fountain of empathy inside us never runs dry, and despite the failures, the frustrations, and the disappointments, both caregivers and patients keep coming back to each other.

There is nothing out of the ordinary about the situations that concern Stein, nor the language he uses to give them life. Alliteration, rhyme, and meter are virtually absent here, as are metaphor and simile. Everything depends on his discerning eye and an empathic, mostly unsentimental heart.

In his poems, nature often serves as a gorgeous counterpoint to our human follies but also conspires against us. The poems are full of description of rain, snow, biting wind and bitter cold—friends of illness. And braving the elements, patients doggedly make their way to us, so that the cold welcome they often receive seems like warmth and comfort by comparison.

In the last third of this ample collection, Stein explores personal loss, and perhaps not surprisingly, this is where his poetry is most powerful. The lives of patients, doctors, nurses, and aides are evoked mostly through the external details that anyone might see, but only a poet would notice. In the poems of the closing section, struggling with personal illness and parental loss, Stein inhabits an internal landscape of loss and redemption. Here, the simplicity and directness of his approach bears riper fruit and, at its best, contains echoes of Emily Dickinson, as in this passage that concludes his final poem, a question that captures the book’s entire project and still reverberates for me long after I’ve closed its covers:

Have you found
A quiet place
For your soul
Where, though you’re
Rent to pieces,
You’re still whole?

It’s an elusive and, as we’ve all experienced, an ephemeral place. You find it for a moment or two each day if you’re lucky, before it’s lost

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