

The Unknowable Enigma of Babies' Dreams

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Infants spend most of their time sleeping, waking up for just a few hours total every day. A lot of growth happens during those spans of shut-eye, though. Research shows that sleep [is just as formative](#) for babies' development as are the scattered bouts of consciousness when their eyes are open and their ears are perked up. As with adults, sleeping [likely helps](#) infants retain or [protect](#) memory and learn language; some evidence also suggests it [promotes](#) healthy physical growth. Technological advances are helping to shed more and more insight on, as the University of Washington professor of early-childhood learning Patricia Kuhl [has put it](#), “the infinite number of secrets” contained in babies' brains.

One secret that those advances have yet to uncover: whether babies dream—and, if they do, what they dream about. “Getting inside the head of a baby,” [wrote](#) the science journalist Angela Saini in a 2013 piece for *The Guardian*, “is like deciphering the thoughts of a kitten.” Brains are composed of so many intangible phenomena, and the technologies used to measure the stuff that is tangible (like brain-scanning machines) are difficult to use on babies. The resulting mystery has made the topic an endless source of intrigue—and of pointed disagreement— among many researchers.