

THE PARENT LINE



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Sleep: An Important Part of Healthy Development

Sleep. It's what all humans need. It is part of the rhythm of life and the life cycle. We know that babies sleep a lot. Babies spend more than half the day sleeping. Even by age two, a toddler spends more time asleep than awake. All in all, nearly 40 percent of childhood is spent sleeping.

Why do we need to sleep? Sleep is a necessary part of healthy brain functioning. The right amount of restful sleep is needed for our overall good health. Sleep has a direct influence on many of the body's functions and helps the body to heal, grow, and stay on track. Recent studies have also linked the risk of obesity to not getting enough sleep. When we get the right amount of sleep, the brain will make chemicals that help control hunger and weight. The amount and quality of sleep we have can affect our safety, how alert we are, as well as our memories, moods, behavior, and learning abilities. Sleep is especially important for children's learning.



How Much Sleep Do Children Need?

Sleep is as important to children's development and well-being as nutrition and physical activity. Making sure children get enough rest is but one of many concerns of parents with young children. However, parents are often not sure how much sleep their children need and how much is enough sleep. Doctors and other experts have recommended the following amounts of sleep for children by age:

Newborns: 11 to 18 hours

Newborns and all infants, sleep on and off for a few hours at time. Babies don't develop a regular awake/sleep pattern until about 6 months of age.

Infants: 14 to 15 hours

From two months to a year, infants' sleeping patterns will change into a regular awake/sleep pattern with one or two naps throughout the day.

Toddlers: 12 to 14 hours

Most toddlers will be sleeping through the night and only

taking one nap during the day.

Preschoolers: 11 to 13 hours

Consistent sleeping patterns should be established by now and toward the last few months of age 5, naps will probably end.

School-Age: 10 to 11 hours

School-age children need adequate sleep to function at their best. Added demands on their time for school, outside activities, and home life, can add to school-age children not getting enough rest.

Healthy Sleeping Practices

Healthy sleep habits are important for everyone. Starting healthy sleeping practices as infants will help them form healthy lifelong patterns.

Parents of newborns will want to follow these healthy sleeping practices for their newborn:

- **Make your newborn's sleeping area quiet and comfortable:** Use a safety-approved crib without any pillows, blankets, or soft items in the crib. Make the room dark and quiet and the temperature comfortable.
- **Place your newborn on his back:** To prevent SIDS, place your newborn on his back to sleep. Side sleeping is not considered completely safe, nor is tummy sleeping.
- **Encourage more night sleeping:** In the evenings, make the environment quiet and less active so babies will start to associate quiet time with going to sleep.
- **Put your newborn to down to sleep when there are signs of drowsiness:** Do not wait until your newborn is asleep to put her to bed. You need to set the stage for your baby to be able to fall asleep on her own. Parents of infants and toddlers up to age three will want to make sure they establish a regular bedtime routine that helps them self-soothe and learn to go to sleep on their own.
- **Have a regular bedtime schedule:** An hour before bedtime, prepare your child by having a quiet environment and doing some soothing activities such as taking a bath or reading a bedtime story.

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- **Place infants and toddlers in bed BEFORE they fall asleep:** Your infant or toddler should be drowsy but NOT asleep when going to bed. This helps them to learn to become independent sleepers and know how it feels when they should go to bed.
- **Create and maintain an enjoyable bedtime routine:** A routine could be as simple as a bath and a bedtime story, or listening to music and playing with a favorite toy. Routines will change as your child gets older.
- **Play when they are awake:** Save the louder, more active and moving around activities for when your toddler is awake. It will help him be ready for quiet play near bedtime.
- **Transition toddlers to their own beds:** If your toddler is not used to being in his own bed, take time to make this transition. Make your toddler comfortable and allow him sleep with a favorite toy or object.



Children around three and four years old most likely already follow a bedtime routine. If not, it is not too late to start one. Here are some things to consider for preschoolers and school-age children:

- **Stick to bedtime routines and consistent sleep schedules:** Children like and need consistency in all parts of their lives. A sleep schedule will help regulate your child's quality of sleep. Make sure they are getting the recommended amount of sleep for their age.
- **Watch out for caffeine in soft drinks (or other drinks):** Caffeine in soft drinks, colas, and coffee drinks should not be part of children's diets and can interfere with sleep. You may want to limit your child's sugar intake as well.
- **Be aware of chronic sleeping problems:** Learn the typical sleeping problems of children. If your child isn't getting the age-recommended or enough sleep, talk to your child's doctor. Sleeping problems can last through adulthood unless addressed early.
- **Keep televisions, computers and other distractions out of your child's room:** Sleeping areas should be quiet and relaxing. Having fun toys or activities can be tempting for children to stay up and not want to sleep.

The Big Sleep—Problems

Sixty nine percent of all children under age 10 experience some sleep condition or sleeping problem.

Know your child's sleeping patterns. Always tell your child's doctor if anything regularly interferes with your child getting a full night of uninterrupted sleep, or you notice breathing problems when your child sleeps.

Speak with your child's doctor if your child regularly experiences any of these common sleep problems. The doctor can determine if it is serious and what can be done. Many sleep disorders in children can be due to stress — especially insomnia or nightmares.

Insomnia - Trouble with getting to sleep, staying asleep, waking up too early and not getting enough sleep.

Nightmares - We all have them from time to time. But some children have them frequently.

Sleepwalking - Sleepwalking can be a problem for children ages 3 through 7. Not getting enough sleep is often a major cause.

Snoring - Although snoring is natural in some children, check to see that snoring isn't due to enlarged tonsils or adenoids.

Sleep Apnea - Sleep apnea is a condition in which a child may experience pauses or stops in breathing while sleeping, often while snoring. Sleep apnea means nasal passages are often blocked. This should be treated by a doctor right away. Drowsiness during the day and being hyperactive are often signs.

Narcolepsy - Extreme sleepiness, tiredness, uncontrollable urges to sleep during the day even when getting enough sleep at night. A doctor needs to diagnose this condition.

Sleeptalking - Talking, laughing or crying out while sleeping. This is not a serious condition and doesn't need to be treated if your child doesn't wake up.

Sleep is an important part of good health. It plays a role in every part of a child's development – physical, cognitive, social and emotional. However, it is easily overlooked. You may naturally assume your child is getting enough sleep because you are. Children need many more hours of sleep than adults. Without enough sleep, children can be grouchy, teary, accident prone, aggressive or not be able to focus or learn and even fall asleep while at child care or in school.

Make sure your child is getting the recommended amount of sleep. Establishing good sleep practices while she is young will not only benefit you, but it will help her for many years to come.



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