

Healthy sleep for your baby and child

Sleep is very important to your child's health and well-being. In fact, good sleep habits start from birth.

Children who do not get enough sleep may have trouble getting through the day. At night, they may find it hard to settle.

How much sleep does my child need?

Every child is different. Some sleep a lot and others much less. This chart is a general guide to the amount of sleep children need over a 24-hour period, including nighttime sleep and daytime naps.

Newborns (birth to 2 months)	16-18 hours a day (3 to 4 hours at a time)
Babies (2 months to 6 months)	14-16 hours
Older babies (6 months to 1 year)	14 hours
Toddlers (1 to 3 years)	10-13 hours
Preschoolers (3 to 5 years)	10-12 hours
School aged children (5-10 years)	10-12 hours

Babies (birth to 6 months)

Newborns may sleep as much as 16 hours a day, for 3 to 4 hours at a time. It's normal and healthy for babies to wake up during the night to feed. As your baby gets older, she will stay awake longer during the day and sleep for longer stretches at night.

Babies, just like adults, need the right cues to learn when it is time to sleep. For example, if you always put your baby in her crib to sleep she will learn that this is the place where she sleeps. Even if this doesn't work right away, over time your baby will come to understand.

Sometime after 3 months, your baby's sleep habits will become more predictable and you can expect a more regular nap schedule. Trust your baby's cues – she will let you know when she is tired. A sleep diary might help you to recognize her regular sleeping pattern.

A naptime routine is a good idea. It could include a quiet cuddle and short story in a darkened room before it's time to nap.

By 4 months, most babies need three naps a day, one in the morning, afternoon and early evening.

Healthy sleep habits for your newborn:

- An overtired baby has more trouble sleeping. Napping actually helps a baby to sleep better at night, so keeping your baby awake during the day will not help your baby sleep longer at night.
- Put your baby in bed when he is drowsy, but awake. Remember to put him to [sleep on his back](#) in his crib, on a firm, flat surface. Keep soft items like pillows and stuffed animals out of the crib.
- It's okay to cuddle and rock your baby. You cannot spoil a newborn baby by holding him.
- A [pacifier](#) might be comforting and help your baby to settle. However, it's best not to start using a pacifier until [breastfeeding](#) is going well.
- Your baby will stir during the night. Give him a few minutes to try and settle on his own before going to him.
- Avoid stimulation during nighttime feedings and diaper changes. Keep the lights dim.

Older babies (6 months to 1 year)

At this age, babies sleep an average of 14 hours in a day, but anything less or more can be normal for your baby. By now you should have a fairly regular routine of naptimes, bedtime and wake times.

During this period your baby will probably change from having 3 naps a day to 2 longer naps, in the morning and afternoon. Every baby's napping needs are different. Some nap for as little as 20 minutes at a time, while others sleep for 3 or more hours.

Healthy sleep habits for your older baby:

- Maintain a regular daytime and bedtime sleep schedule as much as possible.
- A consistent bedtime routine is important. Many parents like to use the "3 Bs": bath, book, then settle into bed.
- Don't put your baby to bed with a bottle. This can lead to [tooth decay](#).
- Babies this age usually don't need to be fed during night-wakings.
- If your baby wakes at night and cries, go to her to see if there is anything wrong such as being too cold or too warm, but don't take her out of the crib. Comfort her by stroking her forehead or talking softly to let her know you're there. This helps your baby learn how to self-soothe, important steps toward falling back to sleep on her own.

Toddlers (1 to 3 years)

Most toddlers sleep between 10 and 13 hours in a 24-hour period. Sometime between 2 and 3 years, your toddler will probably drop to one nap a day, but many will still have a nap at some point in the day. As your child approaches age 3 he can have days when he needs a nap and others when he doesn't. At this age, it's common for children to have some sleep problems and to resist going to bed.

Healthy sleep habits for your toddler:

- It's still important to keep a sleep schedule your child is familiar with. The routine you established during the first year is even more important for your toddler.
- Avoid naps that are too late in the day because they can affect nighttime sleeping.
- Help your child wind down about half an hour before bedtime with stories and quiet activities at around the same time each day.
- Be gentle but firm if your child protests.
- Keep the bedroom quiet, cozy, and good for sleeping, such as keeping the lights dim.
- Soft, soothing music might be comforting.
- Security items (such as a blanket or stuffed animal) are often important at this age.

Preschoolers and young children (4 to 6 years)

Preschoolers typically sleep about 10 to 12 hours a day. Children give up daytime naps during this period. You can use that time—often after lunch—for quiet time for your child to read and relax. At this age, it's common for children to wake up during the night from nighttime fears or nightmares.

Healthy sleep habits for your preschooler:

- Don't give your child drinks with caffeine.
- [Avoid television before bedtime](#). Don't allow television, computer or video games in his bedroom.
- Some children will try to delay bedtime. Set limits, such as how many books you will read together, and be sure your child knows what they are.
- Tuck your child into bed snugly for a feeling of security.
- Don't ignore bedtime fears. If your child has nightmares, reassure and comfort her.

What are some common sleep problems?

- **Sleep deprivation:** Some children don't get enough sleep. If your child is fussy, cranky or has difficulty staying asleep at night it might be because he isn't having enough naptime or isn't getting to bed early enough.
- **Separation issues:** Your child may have difficulty relaxing and going to sleep if he feels upset that you are not there. Try an extra long cuddle before bedtime, a security object such as a blanket or stuffed animal, or leaving her door open when you put her to bed.
- **Nightmares:** Most children will experience nightmares at one time or another. Nightmares can happen after a stressful physical or emotional event or can be caused by fever. Your child may call out to you for comfort. Talk calmly, cuddle and reassure your child.

When should I talk to my doctor?

- **Loud snoring:** If your child regularly snores loudly, this can be a sign of a problem.
- **Sleepwalking:** Sleepwalking is a disorder where a child awakens partly, but not completely, during the night. Your child may sit up in bed and repeat certain movements, such as rubbing her eyes. She may get out of bed and walk around the room. When you talk to your child, she usually won't answer you. If your child sleepwalks it is important that you ensure the area is safe. Gently guide your child back to bed without waking her. If the problem continues, contact your doctor.
- **Night terrors:** These are different from nightmares. Children with night terrors scream uncontrollably, may breathe quickly, and seem to be awake. If you wake your child, he's likely to be confused, and may take longer to settle down and go back to sleep. They usually happen between the ages of 4 and 12, but can happen to children as young as 18 months. Most children will outgrow them, but if they persist talk to your doctor.

What if my child regularly has trouble falling asleep?

Some children have trouble falling to sleep on their own and can lay awake for long periods of time. This can be caused by too much screen time before bed, or caffeine from soda and energy drinks.

- If your child is watching TV or playing video games for long periods of time, try [limiting screen time](#) or cutting it out of her routine.
- Don't allow your child to drink or eat anything with caffeine.
- Try doing relaxing activities before bed such as reading, listening to calming music, or laying in bed with your child talking quietly about her day.

If these reasons aren't the cause, talk to your doctor about other ways to help your child learn to fall asleep on her own.

More information from the CPS:

- [Safe sleep for babies](#)
- [Melatonin for the management of sleep disorders in children and adolescents \(position statement\)](#)

Additional resources:

- [Sleeping behaviour, Good sleep for good growth, Centre for Excellence in Early Childhood Development](#)

Reviewed by the following CPS committees:

Community Paediatrics Committee
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The information on Caring for Kids should not be used as a substitute for medical care and advice. If you have specific concerns about your child's health, please see your child's paediatrician, family physician, or another health care provider.