

Children and Sleep



University Services

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Sleep is a vital need, essential to a child's health and growth. Sleep promotes alertness, memory, and performance. Children who get enough sleep are more likely to function better and are less prone to behavioral problems and moodiness. That is why it is important for parents to start early and help their child develop good sleep habits.

Every child is different and has different sleep needs. This chart presents suggested hours of sleep that include naps for children up to five years of age.

How Much Sleep Should My Child Get?

AGE	HOURS OF SLEEP
0-3 mos.	15-17
3-18 mos.	13-15
18 mos.– 3 yrs.	11-13

Helpful Tips:

- Make bedtime the same time every night.
- Make bedtime a positive and relaxing experience without TV or videos.
- Keep the bedtime environment (light, temperature) the same all night long.

Children Need And Thrive On Routine

The #1 tip for good sleeping habits in children is to follow a nightly routine

A bed time ritual makes it easier for your child to relax, fall asleep, and sleep through the night

A Typical Bedtime Routine

- 1 Have a light snack
- 2 Take a Bath
- 3 Put on Pajamas
- 4 Brush Teeth
- 5 Read a Story
- 6 Make Sure Room is Cool and Quiet
- 7 Put Child to Bed
- 8 Say Goodnight and **Leave**

Talk About Your Sleep With Your Health Care Professional

Encourage children to fall asleep on their own

Have your child form positive associations with sleeping. A child should not need a parent to help him/her fall asleep. The child who falls asleep on his or her own will be better able to return to sleep during normal nighttime awakenings and sleep throughout the night.

Discourage nighttime awakenings

When you go to your child's room every time he or she wakes during the night, you are strengthening the connection between you and sleep for your child. Even babies who are held and cuddled when they wake in the middle of the night soon learn to expect this and do not learn to go back to sleep on their own. Except during conditions when the child is sick, has been injured, or clearly requires your assistance, it is important to give your child a consistent message that they are expected to fall asleep on their own.

Facts and Myths about Children and Sleep

Myth 1: Put children asleep on their stomachs

Babies should be put to sleep on their **backs**. According to the "Back to Sleep" program this lowers the risk of dying from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). The American Academy of Pediatrics also recommends that parents should avoid placing young children to sleep on a water bed, sofa, pillow, soft mattress or other soft surfaces.

Myth 2: Parents should wait until a child is fully asleep before putting a child to bed.

Children should be put to bed when they are drowsy, but still awake.

Myth 3: Children will sleep longer at night if they do not take a nap.

For young children, nap and nighttime sleep are both necessary and independent of each other. Children who nap are usually less cranky and sleep better at night. Although children differ, after six months of age, naps of 1/2 to two hour duration are expected and are generally discontinued between ages 2-5 years. Daytime sleepiness or the need for a nap after this age should be investigated further.

Which sleep problems/disorders should I watch for in children?

Nightmares often occur at times of transition, stress, or change in a child's routine. They usually occur later in night and are remembered the next day. Fortunately, nightmares tend to go away naturally. Encouraging your child to talk about the nightmare, discussing comforting images before bedtime, and avoiding television immediately before bedtime are strategies that assist in alleviating nightmares.

Sleep Terrors/Sleep Walking occur most frequently from ages 4-8. These sleep disruptions occur during the early part of the night. The child is both asleep and awake at the same time and often has no memory of the event the next day. Waking or comforting the child is usually not helpful as it prolongs the event. Be sure your child's room and your house are safe. Most important encourage him/her to get enough sleep.

Sleep Apnea is a series disorder in which there are pauses in breathing during sleep. Children with sleep apnea may snore loudly, experience restless sleep, and be sleepy during the day. Enlarged tonsils or adenoids, allergies, weight problems, and other medical problems may contribute to sleep apnea. There are many different ways to treat apnea, so it is important to see your doctor or visit a sleep center for diagnosis and treatment.

Narcolepsy is often first noticed in puberty, but may occur as early as 10 years of age. Children with narcolepsy experience excessive daytime sleepiness and uncontrollable "sleep attacks," even when they get enough sleep. Children with narcolepsy should be diagnosed by a doctor.

Studies have shown that 37% of children, kindergarten through fourth grade, suffer from at least one sleep-related problem. If your child experience any of these sleep problems or is very sleepy during the day, be sure to consult with your child's physician.



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