

Bedtime, Naptime, and Your Toddler

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Facts:

- Toddlers (12 months to 3 years) require a total of 12-14 hours of sleep per day. That includes naps and overnight sleep.
- Your toddler should sleep about 11-12 hours at night, and she should nap about 1.5 - 2 hours during the day.
- Most toddlers go to bed between 7:00 pm and 9:00 pm, and they wake between 6:30 am and 8:00 am.
- The average toddler does not get enough sleep. He gets only 11 hours of sleep per day, including 9.5 hours of sleep overnight.
- Toddlers may not want to go to bed! They dawdle, protest, cry, get out of bed, etc. Often, sleep problems are temporary. With calm consistency, you can encourage and maintain good sleep habits in your toddler.

What's the big deal about sleep?

- Toddlers must get enough sleep to support the rapid physical growth and brain development that are occurring during this phase of life. They learn a tremendous amount of information during the day and must have regular rest periods.
- Helping your child have consistent daytime naps helps your child sleep better at night. Yes, that's right: Well rested children sleep better overnight!
- Experts recommend that children go to bed *before* they are too tired. It can be difficult for your toddler to fall asleep once he has become overtired.
- Helping your child sleep well overnight helps prepare your child for restful daytime naps, too. (And remember: Well rested children make better dinner companions!)

Okay, so how do I establish good sleep habits in my toddler?

- **Maintain as consistent a schedule as possible for naptimes and bedtimes.**
 - Having a regular routine reduces a child's stress and helps her know what to expect each night.
 - Having a consistent schedule also can help children adapt to other changes that may be occurring, such as the birth of a sibling or a move to another town.
 - It's okay if your child's naptime at home over the weekend varies from the typical naptime at daycare. As long as children have a routine to follow at each place (i.e., home and school), their bodies will adapt.
 - Prepare your child ahead of time. "You'll be going to bed in 30 minutes, Susie, so let's start getting ready." Then, you can begin your bedtime routine.
- **Follow approximately the same bedtime routine every night.** Yes, every night. Choose what works for you and your child. For example, many parents follow the "four Bs": bath, bottle (cup of milk), book, bed. The goal is to help your child unwind and send his body the message that it needs to prepare for sleeping. So, choose quiet, relaxing activities.
 - Think about it: You also follow a routine each night. You brush your teeth, put on pajamas, read, etc., and your body winds down for sleep. (If you don't have a routine, consider adopting one!)

- **Keep the bedroom environment consistent each night, and during the night, too.**
 - For example, if you run a fan or humidifier, use it consistently. As another example, you should keep the temperature about the same.
 - Some children like a light left on or a door slightly open. Try to honor your child's preferences (within reason) to help him be more comfortable.
- **Put your toddler to bed drowsy, but awake.**
 - Your toddler should be able to put herself to sleep, so that when she wakes during the night, she doesn't need you to put her back to sleep.
 - Calmly say "good night," then leave. Ignore whining and protesting.
- **Do not let your child sleep with you.**
 - This arrangement can make it harder for him to fall asleep when he is alone. Also, you may disturb each other during the night, which can make sleep more restless for both of you.
- **Set limits that are consistent and reinforced.**
 - If your child plays the "one more" game (e.g., "one more drink," "one more potty"), try to cover all of the bases beforehand, and limit the number of times you allow your child to get out of bed.
- **Encourage desirable behavior.**
 - In the morning, praise your child for following the bedtime routine, staying in bed through the night, etc.
 - Don't forget the power of praise! "Great job staying in bed, Billy!"
- **Encourage your toddler to use a security object** (blankie, lovey, stuffed animal, etc.) to help comfort himself and prepare for sleeping.
 - If your child is attached to a particular object, consider keeping a spare on hand, just in case it becomes lost, damaged, or needs to go in the washing machine!
 - Make sure the object is safe. Look for ribbons, buttons, or other parts that may be choking hazards. Stuffing or pellets inside stuffed toys can also be dangerous.
- **Do not return to your child's room every time** he complains or calls out. Instead, try the following:
 - Wait several seconds before answering and make your response time longer each time he calls. This will give him a chance to fall asleep on his own.
 - Reassure your child that you are there. If you need to go into the room, do not turn on the light, play with him, or stay too long.
 - Move farther from your child's bed every time you go in, until you can reassure him verbally without entering his room.
 - Remind him each time he calls that it's time to go to sleep.
- **Give it time.** Helping your child develop good sleep habits can be a challenge and it is normal to get upset when a child keeps you awake at night. Try to be understanding. A negative response by a parent can sometimes make a sleep problem worse.

If you would like additional information regarding sleep, consult the AAP and Sleep Foundation websites below. The book *Sleeping through the Night* by Dr. Jodi Mindell is highly recommended as well, and it contains sleep information for adults as well as infants, toddlers, and children.

Sources:

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2007). *Sleep problems in children*. Retrieved January 28, 2009 from <http://www.aap.org/healthtopics/Sleep.cfm>.

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