

Sleeping Well: Tips for Parents of Babies and Young Children

It's important for children to develop good sleep habits early on. Sleeping well is important to children's development and well-being. Here is information from the American Academy of Pediatrics to help ensure a good night's sleep for children—and parents too! Remember that children differ in how much sleep they need, how long it takes them to fall asleep, and how easily they wake up. If you have any questions about your child's sleep habits, ask your child's doctor.

Babies

Babies do not have regular sleep cycles until about 4 months of age. Although newborns sleep about 16 to 17 hours per day, they may sleep for only 1 or 2 hours at a time. As babies get older, they need less sleep. Keep in mind that your baby's sleep needs and patterns may differ from those of other babies.

How to Help Babies Sleep Better at Night

All Babies

- Try not to stimulate or wake babies when you feed or change them during the night. If you speak, speak softly.
- Make daytime playtime. Keep babies awake longer during the day. This helps babies sleep for longer periods during the night. Spend time talking, reading, and playing together.

Babies 4 Months and Older

- Put babies to bed when they are drowsy. Do not wait until babies are asleep. This helps babies learn to fall asleep on their own, in their own bed. If you hold babies or rock them to sleep, they may struggle to go back to sleep if they wake up during the night. Remember to place babies on their back to sleep for every sleep until they are 1 year of age. Visit www.HealthyChildren.org/safesleep to learn more about how to create a safe sleeping environment for babies.
- Do not rush in to soothe a crying baby. Babies need time to put themselves back to sleep, and they need to learn how to fall back asleep on their own. It is normal for a 6-month-old to wake up during the night and then go back to sleep after a few minutes. Of course, you can attend to them—like feeding them, changing a soiled diaper, or comforting them if they are sick—if needed.

Toddlers and Preschoolers

Many parents find their toddler's bedtime to be the hardest part of the day. Children this age often resist going to sleep, especially if they have older siblings who are still awake.

How to Help Toddlers Develop Good Sleep Habits

- Set up a quiet routine before bedtime. This helps children understand that it will soon be time to go to sleep. Use this time to read a story, put on quiet music, or give a bath. Do not play with children before bed, because active play may make them too excited to sleep.

- Be consistent. Make bedtime the same time every night. This helps children know what to expect and helps them establish healthy sleep patterns.
- Let children take a favorite thing to bed each night. Children may want to sleep with a teddy bear, special blanket, or favorite toy. This often helps children fall asleep, especially if they wake up during the night. Make sure the object is safe and doesn't have any choking hazards, like buttons or loose ribbons. Stuffing or pellets inside stuffed toys can also be dangerous.
- Make sure children are comfortable. Take care of children's needs before bedtime so they don't use them as reasons to avoid going to sleep. Children may want a drink of water, a light left on, or the door left slightly open.
- Do not let children sleep in the same bed with you. This can make it harder for them to fall asleep when they are alone.
- Do not return to a child's room when they call out. Instead, try to
 - Make sure children are safe and well before bedtime. If they are safe and well, there is no need to go into their room while they sort out how to get themselves back to sleep.
 - Keep in mind that children's main goal is to get you to appear. So if you appear for any reason, even just for "checking," they will expect you to come each time they call out.
- Give it time. Helping children develop good sleep habits can be a challenge, and it is normal to get upset when children keep you awake at night. Try to be understanding. A negative response from a parent can sometimes make a sleep problem worse. Keep in mind that children need the time and opportunity to find out how go back to sleep on their own when they wake up during the night.

For More Information

American Academy of Pediatrics

www.aap.org and www.HealthyChildren.org

Adapted from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) brochure *Sleep Problems in Children*.

The AAP is an organization of 67,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

In all aspects of its publishing program (writing, review, and production), the AAP is committed to promoting principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

American Academy of Pediatrics
DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



 healthychildren.org
Powered by pediatricians. Trusted by parents.
from the American Academy of Pediatrics