

How much sleep do children need?

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Sleep is an important factor in all our lives. When we sleep, we rest and our body is able to renew its energy. It is quite natural that we spend a lot of time talking about how we have slept and whether our children have slept and how much.

Sleep is also important because of dreams. When we dream, we process all the events of daily life. Getting a good night's sleep, therefore, influences our psychological well being.

Sleeping well is often a result of having good sleeping habits, which parents are responsible for teaching to their children.

How much sleep does a child need?

Your child's sleeping pattern - whether or not they sleep and for how long - affects the entire family. This is why good sleeping habits and rules about bedtime are important.

How much sleep a child needs depends on the individual, and this article can only serve as a guide.

You may have a very active child who does not need much sleep. Trying to change a child's sleep patterns to what somebody else claims is 'normal' will only cause trouble.

How much sleep does a newborn need?

A newborn usually sleeps between 16 and 19 hours per day, often waking every two to three hours to eat.

Since hunger will usually wake them up, babies will not normally sleep for more than four or five hours at a time.

Some babies sleep more than this, maybe for eight or 10 hours at a time. This is fine, provided your child is normal and healthy.

On the other hand, if your baby has lost weight or is not gaining enough weight, you may have to wake her every two or three hours for a feed. Your doctor or health visitor will tell you what to do if this is the case.

How much sleep does a three-month-old need?

A three-month-old baby usually sleeps between 13 and 15 hours per day. Around five hours of this will be during the day and the rest at night.

Your baby may still wake up once or twice every night. If your baby does wake, try the following.

First see if your baby will fall quickly back to sleep. If the duvet has been kicked off, put the cover back on and rub her body gently, just to reassure her that you are there. This may be sufficient to send your tot back to sleep, so let a couple of minutes pass before doing anything else.

If you need to feed or change your baby, do it quickly and quietly, without turning on the lights. Don't talk to your baby or play with her at this time. This will teach your baby that nothing exciting happens in the night and that talking and playing only happen during the day.

Babies don't care whether they sleep at night and stay awake during the day, or the other way around. It's up to parents to teach them which is better.

How much sleep does an infant need from 6 to 12 months?

At this age, your baby usually sleeps between 12 and 14 hours per day.

If your baby wakes up at night, it is now all right to let five minutes pass before you go to her. By now you will probably recognize your baby's different cries for when she is hungry, tired or in pain.

Resource Materials from Healthy Start Fall Forum 2009

Presenters: David Whitestone, PhD

Kate McLinn, PhD

Rub your baby gently and speak softly to reassure her that you are there. She may have a favorite soft toy or blanket to snuggle up to at night. Such familiar things will make your baby feel safe.

How much sleep does a child need between the ages of one and three?

A toddler usually sleeps between 10 and 12 hours per day.

It's a good idea to have a pre-bedtime routine that, as far as possible, is always the same to prepare your child for bedtime and sleep. This way, your child will know when it is time for bed.

What is a bedtime routine?

It's doing the same things, in the same order, at the same time every day, just before going to bed. A routine that lasts 15 to 30 minutes is best. Below is an example.

Let your child calm down by playing a quiet game together.

Let your child choose what pajamas to wear.

Get her to brush her teeth, go to the toilet etc.

Listen to some soft music.

Read or tell a story.

Tuck your child in with her blanket, teddy bear or some other thing that makes her feel secure.

How much sleep does a pre-school child need?

A three to five year old usually sleeps between 10 and 12 hours every night.

Sleeping routines and bedtime have become familiar, but at this age children can suffer from nightmares.

If your child wakes up crying because of a nightmare, she needs comfort and security.

Go to your child's room.

Rub her back gently.

Speak softly.

Do not ask your child about the dream. Often, she won't be fully awake and will go back to sleep faster if you just sit with her quietly. She usually won't even remember the nightmare in the morning.

How much sleep does a schoolchild need?

A schoolchild usually needs to sleep about 10 hours every night. When deciding on a bedtime, bear in mind what time your child has to get up and how long it takes her to get ready for school. You want your child to get a good night's sleep and feel rested in the morning. If not, your child won't get the best out of school and every morning will be a hassle, trying to get a tired child out of bed.

What if my child does not sleep as much as I think they should?

Use common sense. If your child looks rested and is developing normally, she is probably getting enough sleep.

Do you or your partner sleep less than normal (six to eight hours)? The need for sleep is often passed on from parents.

If you're concerned about your child's sleeping habits, ask your GP or health visitor for advice.

If my child wakes up crying, should I just ignore her?

No. A crying child always needs to know her parents are there. Children need security.

Rub your child's back gently, speak softly and tuck her in again. Do this several times, if necessary.

If your child cries, you should always make sure that she isn't sick or running a [fever](#).