

Sleep Routines

A good night's sleep is crucial for kid's healthy growth, development and immune function. Sleep affects eating, behaviors, ability to function in school. We all know what a challenge a cranky child can be due to lack of sleep. Children need sleep to grow – the human growth hormone is released during deep sleep.

Some parents try to get a sleep schedule established right from birth. Babies haven't matured enough in their sleep cycles and their sleep stages are very different from adults. It is not possible before three months of age to establish a true schedule of sleep.

Newborns sleep about 16 – 17 hours in 24. By 4 months of age, most are sleeping about 15 hours in 24 with the longest stretch (hopefully) being at night and may be anywhere from 4 to 8 hours long. They will usually have a mid-morning and mid-afternoon nap. As soon as this pattern is established, it is good to help them to follow it as much as possible.

This is a typical expectation of sleep at specific ages:

2 years old – 13 hours

5 years old – 11 hours

6 – 11 years old – 9.5 – 11 hours

The most important factor in establishing a good bedtime is routine.

It is important to help babies understand that night is for sleep. There should be minimal talking, no lights or just a small night light, blinds closed to keep out the light. Do not let your child associate waking at night as a social time.

Babies and young children need to be trained to associate certain routines with sleep. Having a big wrestling match with daddy or watching something exciting or scary on TV are not conducive to sleep. Here are some ideas for bedtime routines you could choose from.

Having a quiet game or activity as children near bedtime helps; things like a puzzle or game with the family. Bedtime snacks are good, but not spicy foods, caffeinated drinks or pop. Good ideas might be crackers and cheese and a glass of milk. This could be followed by a bath, jammies and brushing teeth. A cuddle and a story or two make seem like a good transition to sleep as well. Do some rituals in the bedroom that make the transition easier; things like kissing favorite teddies or dolls and saying good night to the bedroom. Some parents like to sing a favorite, quiet song or say a prayer together. This is also a good time to talk quietly about the day. Often, this will be the time that children will reveal events or ask questions they didn't talk about in more active times of the day. Some parents will have a specific music tape for children to listen to as they fall asleep; it could be nature sounds like rustling wind, ocean sounds or tape of lullabies. Another idea is a hot water bottle to put their feet on. A special treat when it is cold outside is to throw a flannelette sheet in the dryer and put it on child under their covers. Try to leave them with a positive image – a hug, an "I love you," praise for something positive.