

Healthy Sleep Habits for Infants and Toddlers

Sleep is important at all ages. Sleep problems are common among infants and toddlers, affecting both the child and the parents.

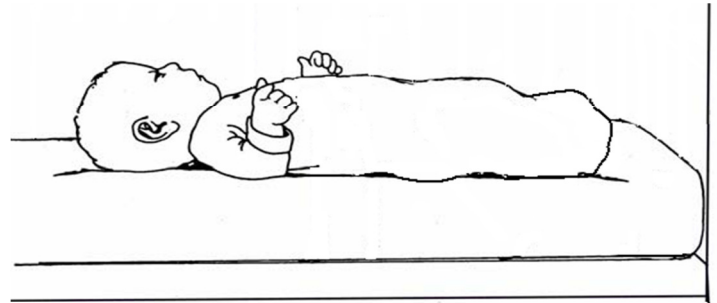
What to Do

How much sleep a child needs each day depends on age. Newborns sleep about 16 to 20 hours and are awake about 1 to 2 hours between periods of sleep. Infants sleep about 13 to 15 hours including nighttime sleep, morning naps and afternoon naps. Toddlers sleep about 12 hours including an afternoon nap.

It is normal for newborns and babies to have pauses of 15 to 20 seconds between breaths while they are asleep. The pauses should become shorter and less frequent as your baby gets older.

Here are some ways to improve your child's sleep.

1. Make sure your baby is not hungry when you put him to bed. Feed your baby right before bedtime so he or she is not hungry when put to bed.
2. Place your child in bed when he is sleepy but not yet asleep. Make sure your child is still awake when he is put down for naps and at bedtime. Placing your baby in bed while he is still awake lets him learn to fall asleep on his own.
3. Have a nighttime routine and a regular sleep schedule.
 - Set a bedtime for your child. Be sure to stick with the time you select by putting your baby to bed at the same time every night.
 - Start a nighttime routine that includes feeding, bath, bedtime story, etc.
4. Do not let your child nap for too long or too late in the day. Try to limit naps to no more than 3 hours. Also, make sure your child is awake from the afternoon nap by 4 pm. Children who sleep later than 4 pm may not be ready to go back to sleep when it is their bedtime.
5. Do not put your child in bed with a bottle or cup. Sleeping with milk or juice in the mouth can lead to cavities and tooth decay.
6. Remember to always place your child on his back when putting him to bed, no matter his age (Picture 1).



Picture 1 Always place your baby in bed on his back.

Preventing and Breaking Habits

Sleeping in parents' bed – If your child has been sleeping in your bed, and you wish to change this, it may be hard to break this habit. It is better to put your baby to sleep in his own bed at a younger age. When your child is sleepy but not fully asleep, place him in his own bed. He may cry. You can look in on him to see if he is OK but leave him in his own bed. It will be frustrating at first, but for this to work, you cannot give in and bring your child to your bed.

Night-time feedings – When babies are twice their birth weight (at about 6 months) they may no longer need a night-time feeding. Your baby will still wake up for the feeding. Ask your baby's doctor when you can start to shorten the night-time feeding a little at a time until it is no longer needed.

When to Call Your Baby's Doctor

Call your baby's doctor if:

- Sleep problems continue even after you follow the tips above.
- Your child snores loudly or has long pauses in breathing during sleep.
- You have any other questions or concerns.

Remember: refer to Helping Hand, *SIDS Reduction: Safe Sleep Practices for Infants*, HH-IV-69.