

Sleep in Toddlers (1–3 Years)

WHAT TO EXPECT

Toddlers sleep between 12 and 14 hours across the day and night. By 18 months, most toddlers have given up their morning nap and are taking one long afternoon nap of 1.5–3 hours. The number of hours a toddler sleeps will be different for each child, but expect your toddler to sleep about the same amount each day. Continue to expect that sleep will be disrupted by illness, changes in routine, and other stressful events. Separation anxiety may also cause problems at bedtime. Most toddlers switch from a crib to a bed between 2 and 3 years of age. If the change happens too early, it can disrupt sleep.

Many toddlers continue to awaken during the night, usually as a result of poor sleep habits. All children wake briefly throughout the night. However, a toddler who has not learned how to fall asleep on his own at bedtime will not be able to return to sleep without help from his parents.

HOW TO HELP YOUR TODDLER SLEEP WELL

- **Develop a daily sleep schedule.** Have regular nap times and a bedtime that ensures enough nighttime sleep. Napping too late in the afternoon can make it hard for your toddler to fall asleep at bedtime, but avoid cutting back on naps to encourage nighttime sleep as this will result in overtiredness and a worse night's sleep.
- **Encourage use of a security object.** Helping your toddler become attached to a security object that he can keep in bed with him can be beneficial. This often helps a child feel more relaxed at bedtime and throughout the night.
- **Develop a bedtime routine.** Establish a consistent bedtime routine that includes calm and enjoyable activities, such as a bath and bedtime stories. The activities occurring closest to “lights out” should occur in the room where your toddler sleeps.
- **Set up a consistent bedroom environment.** Make sure your child's bedroom environment is the same at bedtime as it is throughout the night. Some older toddlers may find a nightlight reassuring. Also, toddlers sleep best in a room that is dark, cool, and quiet.
- **Put your toddler to bed drowsy but awake.** Encourage your toddler to fall asleep independently by putting him to bed drowsy but awake. This will enable him to fall back to sleep on his own when he naturally awakens during the night.
- **Set limits.** If your toddler stalls at bedtime, be sure to set clear limits, such as how many books you will read.
- **Contact your child's doctor if:**
 - Your child appears to have any trouble breathing, snores, or is a noisy breather.
 - Your child has unusual nighttime awakenings or significant nighttime fears that are concerning.
 - Your child has difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, and/or if sleep problems are affecting his behavior during the day.

© Mindell JA & Owens JA (2003). *A Clinical Guide to Pediatric Sleep: Diagnosis and Management of Sleep Problems*. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Supported by an educational grant from 