

Sleep in Toddlers (1–3 Years)

WHAT TO EXPECT

Toddlers sleep, on average, between 11 and 13 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 to 3 hours. Some toddlers, though, will continue taking 2 shorter naps a day until 20 or 21 months. 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. Sleep may 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. It is better to wait until closer to 3 years of age. If the change happens too early, it can disrupt sleep. In this case, switch back to the crib and try again when your child is older.

Many toddlers continue to wake up during the night, usually as a result of poor sleep habits. All children wake briefly throughout the night. A toddler who has not learned how to fall asleep on his own at bedtime, such as needing to be rocked or have a parent lie down with him, will not be able to return to sleep without help when he naturally awakens during the night.

HOW TO HELP YOUR TODDLER SLEEP WELL

- **Develop a daily sleep schedule:** Have a regular bedtime, wake time, and nap times. Set a bedtime that makes sure that your child gets enough sleep at night. Avoid late bedtimes (after 9:00 p.m.) for your toddler. Although his morning schedule may allow him to “sleep in,” morning light and household activity may wake him up and prevent him from getting enough sleep. Having an early bedtime will also help establish a routine that will work with childcare and preschool start times. In addition, napping too late in the afternoon can make it hard for your toddler to fall asleep at bedtime. But, avoid cutting back on naps as a way of encouraging nighttime sleep. This will result in your child being overtired and getting a worse night’s sleep.
- **Encourage use of a security object:** Help your toddler become attached to a security object that he can keep in bed with him. It can be a stuffed animal, a blanket, or any other favorite object. 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. Avoid including television viewing or any technology use as part of the bedtime routine, as this interferes with falling asleep. 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 night-light reassuring. Also, toddlers sleep best in a room that is dark, cool, and quiet. Don’t put a television or computer or a gaming system in your child’s bedroom.
- **Put your toddler to bed awake:** Encourage your toddler to fall asleep on his own by putting him to bed 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 ahead of time, 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 nighttime fears that are concerning.
 - Your child has difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, and/or if sleep issues are affecting his behavior during the day.