

# Sleep in Toddlers (1–3 Years)

## WHAT TO EXPECT

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Toddlers sleep, on average, between 11 and 13 hours across the day and night. By age 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 age 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. Anticipate that 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, but it is better to wait until closer to age 3 years. 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 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, 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

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- **Develop a daily sleep schedule:** Have a regular bedtime, waketime, and nap times, bedtime that ensures adequate nighttime sleep. In general, 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 be compatible 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, 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. Avoid including television viewing 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 cool and quiet. Don’t put a television or computer or a gaming system in your child’s bedroom.
- **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 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 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.