



Better sleep for little ones

So mom and dad, can't remember what it feels like not to be tired? If you are reading this, your little one is probably still fighting the sandman and you are overwhelmed by sleep deprivation and desperate for advice on sleep training. Sounds about right?

During the early days of life with your new bundle of joy you're so focused on baby's health and wellbeing that sleepless nights seem like a small price to pay. However, by month three, you're pretending to be asleep, hoping that your partner is up for the pyjama drill!

Fact is: Children need sleep. We all do. Without it, we get cranky, and with time, unhealthy. For kids, sleep deprivation can threaten healthy development and growth. We're talking obesity, as well as behavioural and learning problems that could affect a child's life forever.

So, how much sleep does a child need? Here are the recommended amounts (including naps):

- **Infants: 12 to 16 hours.**
- **Toddlers: 11 to 14 hours.**
- **Pre-schoolers: 10 to 13 hours.**

The good news is that a good night's sleep for your baby or toddler doesn't have to be complicated. Nor does it have to involve crying or traditional "sleep training". Sometimes a few little tweaks are all that's needed.

Here's what we recommend:

- **Stick to a routine.** Set a non-negotiable bedtime. A set bedtime will make them feel secure because it offers predictability. Try to keep the same routine on weekends and vacations. A little leeway is okay, but remember, it throws our bodies off when our schedules change.

- **Have a sequence.** Brush teeth, read a story, cuddle, lights out – so everyone knows what will happen. Work as a team with your partner and carry the strategy out consistently.
- **Make sure that toys and distractions are cleaned up before bed.** Creating a healthy sleep association with the bedroom will make it easier to fall asleep.
- **Power down at least an hour before bedtime.** What happens during the day affects the night. Screens such as TVs, tablets, and smartphones will stimulate and keep little ones wide awake and even disrupt sleep. If your toddler is participating in screen-time at night, we recommend powering down at least an hour before bedtime.

Up until the age of four, parents really do have to teach their children to sleep. This means taking them back to bed when they get up at the wrong time and helping to soothe their anxiety after bad dreams.

If you're still facing a little insomniac after all your best efforts, don't despair. Pull back a little and consider what might be going on. It's normal for kids to regress a little as they face a new developmental milestone or struggle to process a significant event.

The takeaway? There are no hard and fast rules for bedtime, and every child is different. What's important is to build a routine that works for your family.

So, stick to your guns, mom and dad, and good luck!

Sources: mybabysleepguide.com, baby-sleep-advice.com, babycenter.com, devinecaroline.com, wee-wander.com, parents.com, stanfordchildrens.org, health.harvard.edu, littleones.co, sleep.org, healthline.com, strong4life.com