

Get Your Child To Sleep So You Can Too!

Basic Sleep Information

There are four sleep stages. Children are programmed for deep sleep and should flow through each stage. These stages change with your child's development. Very young infants should not be expected to sleep through the night but, you should see a gradual increase in the duration of sleeping as they become older. The stages are:

1. Drowsy - Tired but not asleep.
2. Light Sleep - Easily awakened.
3. Deep Sleep- This is when dreams can occur. Your child will remember dreams and possibly nightmares during this stage but, can still be awakened.
4. REM Sleep - The brain is very active and the body is still. Infants and toddlers spend most of their sleep time in this stage.
 - a. You can do housework or other things near the child during this stage, they are sound asleep.
 - b. This is the stage in which sleep walking and night terrors occur. If your child is a sleep walker or has night terrors, do not do anything and especially do not wake them up. They will not remember these things and waking them up will only confuse them more.
 - c. Growing occurs during this stage. If your child does not reach this stage of sleep regularly, it can affect their growth.



Things That Can Get In The Way Of Good Sleep

- Snoring can interrupt deep sleep and be an indicator of a bigger problem in your child's wellbeing. Having large tonsils or adenoids is a common cause of snoring and other sleep problems, it can affect your child's ability to breathe at night.
- If your child complains of achy or tingling legs, they may have Restless Leg Syndrome. A common cause of Restless Leg Syndrome is iron deficiency. To find out if this is a problem for your child, ask your pediatrician for the needed evaluation of ferritin levels.
- As your infant becomes a toddler they need to learn self-calming skills to be able to sleep on their own through the night. If they do not learn these skills they will turn to you every time they need comfort. Infants may wake up multiple times throughout the night but, this should decrease as they become older. Too much light, stimulation, caffeine, etc. can impact sleep and cause them to wake up often.
- Light tells our bodies it is time to wake up. The brain turns off the production of melatonin, the hormone that makes us sleepy.
- Our bodies have an internal clock which tells us when it is time to sleep and when it is time to wake up. Some children have a weak internal clock which makes it difficult to keep their own schedule. In these cases, you will need to provide a schedule for them.
- Anxiety, fear and loneliness are common issue for children when trying to get them to sleep. Very young children are unable to determine what is real and what is imaginary. Thoughts about things they see and hear on television can worry and scare them and keep their minds active which makes it difficult for them to go to sleep.

Techniques and Tips

There are many techniques and tips that are useful to assist your child with sleeping through the night. It is imperative that you discuss your child's sleep pattern with a pediatrician if you have concerns and eliminate the possibility of any medical issues such as teething, pain, breathing difficulties, etc. It is important to remember that you are teaching them self-calming techniques and to support them through all of the following processes.

1. Determine a sleep schedule for your child. If they go to sleep and wake up at different times each day make changes. Develop a schedule and follow it which includes waking up, napping and going to bed at consistent times. Adjusting the schedule may include waking them up earlier or allowing them to sleep longer. Both of these methods have proven to increase the length of sleep at night. Remember, each child is different!
2. Avoid television and other stimulation before bedtime. This will give their mind a chance to calm and slow down. Make their room as dark as possible to help them sleep. When you wake them up, bring as much light into their room as you can. This will help trigger the brain that it is time to get up.
3. Some children may have lower levels of Melatonin. It is very important for them to have very obvious visual cues of dark and light when it is time for bed. If your child is still having a hard time going to sleep discuss other options with your pediatrician. Sleeping difficulties are very common with certain disorders and disabilities.
4. The following technique should only be used if you know that your child's difficulty going to sleep is simply behavioral which is uncommon with most infants and toddlers: When putting your child to bed establish a routine that may include very simply saying, "It is time for bed. I will be on the other side of the door. Good night." Decide how long you are comfortable with closing the door. You can start with one minute. After one minute go in to let your child know you are there if they become upset. Do not touch your child. If you have to put them back in bed do so, but that is all. Calmly state, "You'll be fine, it's time to go to sleep. Now we are going to have to close the door for 2 minutes." Repeat after 2 minutes, and increase the time you are outside the door. Do not go past 5 minutes the first night. Repeat this every 5 minutes or as long as necessary throughout the night. The second night start at 2 or 3 minutes, increasing to 8 to 10 minutes. After a few nights, you should notice your child going to sleep sooner each and 90% of the time it works in 4 nights. Your child will realize that nothing they do is going to change your behavior, and they will learn to calm themselves so they can go to sleep.
5. Any changes to the established routine like going on vacation, etc. may throws off the sleep schedule. Repeat the process as needed and it should work in 1 to 2 nights.

Additional Resources

Sleep - The Brazelton Way - T. Berry Brazelton

www.zerotothree.org

www.familysleep.com

