

## **Common sleep problems in toddlers**

### **Bedtime routines**

It is easier for toddlers to fall asleep if they have a bedtime routine. And if it's easier for your child, it's easier for you.

Routines do not have to be elaborate or even mean going to bed at a precise time each night. A routine can simply involve brushing teeth followed by reading a book in bed.

You may prefer to keep your child awake later at night. This allows for more freedom to go places with him in the evening. Parents may like this if they have been away all day at work.

Or you might prefer to get her in bed at a set time every night, giving you more quiet time in the evening. Whichever you choose, remember that it is difficult for a child to switch back and forth. Find out what works best for your family.

### **Getting enough rest**

Your toddler is a bundle of energy. Along with that, toddlers need plenty of sleep. Although sleep patterns vary greatly, your toddler probably needs 11 to 12 hours of sleep each night.

Toddlers can easily become overtired to the point where it is difficult to settle down for sleep. Your child may insist that he is not tired enough to nap. This may be true, but toddlers still need a rest.

You can help by providing restful activities, such as reading or quiet time.

### **New nap schedule**

Somewhere around 15 to 18 months old, your toddler will probably need fewer naps. The transition from two daily naps to one can be rocky. Be patient. You and your child will find what works best. Most toddlers nap either late in the morning before a late lunch, or early afternoon after an early lunch.

You may want to wake your toddler from her nap to ensure she can fall asleep earlier at night. Be gentle and allow your toddler plenty of time to wake up. Peaceful cuddling with a blanket or toy might help.

## **Bedtime difficulties**

Even if you keep your child to a strict bedtime schedule, he may occasionally make a fuss about going to bed. If he does:

- Say goodnight and assure him that you will check on him in 10 minutes.
- If he is still awake after 10 minutes, say goodnight again and tell him you will return in 15 minutes. Continue this until he falls asleep.

## **Waking during the night**

It is common for toddlers to wake up and be cold, hungry, or thirsty. They may also simply be frightened from a bad dream or the dark. It helps to get to your child quickly. Hold her and reassure her that everything is all right.

Bad dreams often are the result of anxiety or stress, such as changes in day care or other routines. Be patient with your child. The nighttime waking will pass and you will both sleep better soon.

Some toddlers get out of bed and wander the house while their parents sleep. This is unsafe. Talk with your child's doctor, nurse practitioner, or nurse if this occurs.

## **Sleep patterns vary**

Children's sleep patterns vary. It is difficult to set specific standards for all children. As a parent, you need to find out what works best for you and your child. Many of the patterns your child develops early on will continue and become a part of your child's personality.

**Family Focus** is a series of positive parenting tips and information sheets developed by specialists at Children's Hospitals and Clinics, Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN. For a complete list of topics, visit our Web site: [www.childrensmn.org](http://www.childrensmn.org), and click on "For Families and Patients" then "Positive Parenting."

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