

## Healthy Sleep Habits for Infants and Toddlers

Sleep is important at all ages. Sleep problems are common among infants and toddlers, affecting both the child and the parents.

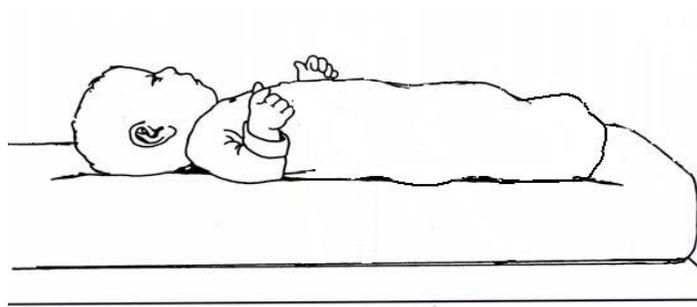
### What to do

How much sleep a child needs each day depends on age. Newborns sleep about 16 to 20 hours and are awake about 1 to 2 hours between periods of sleep. Infants sleep about 13 to 15 hours including nighttime sleep, morning naps and afternoon naps. Toddlers sleep about 12 hours including an afternoon nap.

It is normal for newborns and babies to have pauses of 15 to 20 seconds between breaths while they are asleep. The pauses should become shorter and less frequent as your baby gets older.

Here are some ways to improve your child's sleep.

1. Make sure your baby is not hungry when you put him or her to bed. Feed your baby right before bedtime (be sure to burp him) so he is not hungry when put to bed.
2. Place your child in bed when he is sleepy but not yet asleep. Make sure your child is still awake when he is put down for naps and at bedtime. Placing your baby in bed while he is still awake lets him learn to fall asleep on his own.
3. Remember to always place your child on his back when putting him to bed, up to one year of age (Picture 1).
4. Have a nighttime routine and a regular sleep schedule.
  - Set a bedtime for your child. Be sure to stick with the time you select by putting your baby to bed at the same time every night.
  - Start a nighttime routine that includes feeding, bath, bedtime story, etc.



**Picture 1** Always place your baby in bed on his back.

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## What to do, continued

5. Do not let your child nap for too long or too late in the day. Try to limit naps to no more than 3 hours. Also, make sure your child is awake from the afternoon nap by 4 pm. Children who sleep later than 4 pm may not be ready to go back to sleep when it is their bedtime.
6. Do not put your child in bed with a bottle or cup. Sleeping with milk or juice in the mouth can lead to cavities and tooth decay.
7. Consider offering a pacifier at nap time and bedtime. If your newborn is breastfeeding, wait until after breastfeeding is well established before offering a pacifier. This is usually around 3 to 4 weeks of age. Using a pacifier may reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome. Refer to Helping Hand HH-IV-69, *Safe Sleep Practices for Babies*.

## Preventing and breaking habits

**Sleeping in parents' bed** – Safe sleep practices for infants up to one year of age include room sharing without bed sharing. **An infant under one year of age must sleep on his back in his own bed.** If your older child has been sleeping in your bed, and you wish to change this, it may be a challenge to break the habit. It is better to put your baby to sleep in his own bed at a younger age when it is easier to teach him to sleep alone.

**Develop and follow a regular bedtime routine** - At the point in the routine when your child is sleepy, but not fully asleep, place him in his bed. He may fuss for a few minutes. You can check on him every few minutes to see if he is OK but leave him in his own bed for several more rounds of “fuss and check,” letting the fussy periods last for 10 minutes at the most. Do not keep going into his room or let him see you, or you will condition him to expect you to keep coming back when he fusses. He will eventually fall asleep. The next night, allow the fussy periods to last a little longer. It will be frustrating at first, but for this to work, you must be persistent and consistent. If you are not successful after several weeks you may wish to stop this plan and try again in 4 to 6 weeks. This method is not for everyone, so ask your child’s pediatrician for other options if needed.

**Night-time feedings** – When babies are twice their birth weight (at about 6 months) they may no longer need a night-time feeding. Your baby will still wake up for the feeding. Ask your baby’s doctor when you can start to shorten the night-time feeding a little at a time until it is no longer needed.

## When to call your baby’s doctor

Call your baby’s doctor if:

- Sleep problems continue even after you follow the tips above.
- Your child snores loudly or has long pauses in breathing during sleep.
- You have any other questions or concerns.