

## Sleep in Preschoolers (3-5 years)

### What to expect

Preschoolers need between 11 and 13 hours of sleep. The number of hours a preschooler sleeps will be different for each child, but expect your preschooler to sleep for about the same amount of time each day. Most preschoolers stop taking naps between 3 and 5 years of age. Some preschoolers continue to awaken during the night, usually as a result of poor sleep habits. All children wake briefly throughout the night. However, a preschooler who has not learned how to fall asleep on her own at bedtime will not be able to return to sleep without help from her parents.

Sleep problems are common during the preschool years, including nighttime fears and nightmares. Nighttime fears and nightmares are a part of normal development. Sleepwalking and sleep terrors are also common during the preschool years and peak in this age group.

### How to help your preschooler sleep well

- **Develop a regular sleep schedule.** Your preschooler should go to bed and wake up about the same time each day. You may find that your preschooler has a “second wind” in the evening. Move bedtime earlier or later to a time when your child is more physiologically ready for sleep. Also, be sure that your child is ready for sleep before putting her to bed. This may seem obvious, but sometimes parents set a bedtime based on their own convenience. For example, some children’s biological clocks make them more likely to be “night owls”. These children may have difficulty with an earlier bedtime.
- **Maintain a consistent bedtime routine.** Establish a bedtime routine that is the same every night and includes calm and enjoyable activities, such as a bath and bedtime stories. The activities occurring closest to “lights out” should occur in the room where your preschooler sleeps.
- **Set up a soothing sleep environment.** Make sure your child’s bedroom is comfortable, dark, cool, and quiet. A nightlight is fine; a television is not.
- **Set limits.** If your preschooler stalls at bedtime, be sure to set clear limits, 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 her sleep problems are affecting her behavior during the day.

From: Mindell JA & Owens JA (2003). A Clinical Guide to Pediatric Sleep: Diagnosis and Management of Sleep Problems. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.