



## Establishing Healthy Napping Habits



**A**ll children need adequate sleep to function at their best. For young children, naps are critical to achieving the total sleep time they require. And, like they do at bedtime, some children may resist naptime.

Every parent knows how a missed nap can wreak havoc on an otherwise perfectly good day. Unfortunately, when naptime becomes too frustrating, parents often decide to stop daily naps, even though their young children still need them for proper growth, development and healthy emotional functioning. The solution is to establish a positive naptime routine and schedule.



### Tips for Pleasant and Successful Toddler Naptimes:

- **Establish a healthy naptime routine from the beginning.** As an infant, your child will initially need your help to learn to fall asleep. Put your child down for naps in his crib or bed, in a quiet, dark room.
- **Your child's age matters when it comes to napping and what to expect.** During the first year of life, children take more than one nap per day. On average, 1-month-olds nap four times per day, 3-month-olds nap three times

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per day and 6-month-olds nap two times per day. Children may continue to take more than one nap per day until they are 18 months old.

- **Paying attention to how long your child stays awake between naps will help you develop an effective naptime plan.** At one month, infants are ready to nap after being awake for 90 minutes. Watch for your infant's sleep cues (rubbing eyes, crying, fussing) after 60 to 75 minutes of wakefulness so you can help him or her fall asleep. As your child gets older, he or she will stay awake for longer periods of time between naps, usually in 90-minute increments (i.e., 90 minutes, 3 hours, 4.5 hours, etc.).
- **Pay attention to your child's sleep-wake schedule.** At 18 months to 2 years, toddlers typically sleep nine hours at night and nearly three hours during the day. Three-year-olds typically sleep 10 hours at night and just over 90 minutes during the day. If you try to put your child down too early, he or she may not be ready to nap. If you put your child down too late, he or she may have trouble falling asleep at bedtime. For children who nap twice a day, late morning and mid-afternoon naps are most common. For children who nap once a day, a mid-day nap – sometime between noon and 3 p.m. – is best.
- **Set a firm rule that your toddler must stay in his or her room during naptime.** It's fair to expect your toddler to sleep (or at least rest) for 60 to 90 minutes. If your child comes out of his or her room before that time frame, help your child return to the room right away. If he or she comes out again, help your child return and close the door for a short time.
- **If your toddler is at home with you during the day, make sure he or she sleeps in a bed or crib for naps.** Allowing a child to sleep in a place (e.g., your bed, a couch) that is different from where he or she sleeps at night can cause difficulties at bedtime.



- **Teach your child to fall asleep on his or her own.** Resist lying down with your child because, over time, he or she will learn to fall asleep only when you are there. That will make it difficult for your child to fall asleep without you being present, both during naptime and bedtime.
- **Stay calm and follow through** with your child's regular nap routine, even when things get stressful or difficult.
- **Children begin to give up naps at around age 4.** As you notice that your child needs a nap less often, replace napping with daily quiet time. During quiet time, your child can look at or read books or play quietly with toys in his or her room. This will help your child feel rested and energized, and ready to tackle the remainder of the day.

## Additional Resources

- ***Good Night, Sweet Dreams, I Love You: Now Get Into Bed and Go to Sleep!*** by Patrick C. Friman
- ***Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems*** by Richard Ferber
- ***The Bedtime Pass*** by Connie J. Schnoes, Ph.D.

➔ **For more information** or to make an appointment at the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, call **531-355-3358**.

Visit **BoysTown.org/Parenting** for more information from the parenting experts at Boys Town.