



Toddler Sleep





Sleep patterns for toddlers aged 1-3 years old are characterized by a combination of daytime naps and nighttime sleep, with individual variations in nap schedules and sleep needs. Night wakings are common during this stage, as toddlers may still be adjusting to consolidated nighttime sleep. Consistency, patience, and a supportive sleep environment are key factors in promoting healthy sleep habits during this stage of development.

Ages 1-2:

- Toddlers in this age group typically need around 11-14 hours of sleep per day, including both nighttime sleep and daytime naps.
- Most toddlers still take one or two naps during the day, with each nap lasting approximately 1-2 hours. Nap schedules can vary widely among toddlers, with some children transitioning to one longer nap by age 2, while others may continue to take two shorter naps.

Sleep Regression: Toddlers may experience sleep regressions around major developmental milestones, such as learning to walk, talk, or teething. These regressions can disrupt sleep patterns temporarily, causing more frequent night wakings or difficulty settling at bedtime. Consistency and patience are key during these phases, as toddlers may need extra comfort and reassurance from caregivers.

Ages 2-3:

- As toddlers approach age 2 and beyond, daytime naps may begin to consolidate into one longer nap lasting 1.5-3 hours, usually occurring in the early afternoon.

Transition to "Big Kid Bed:" Some toddlers may transition from a crib to a toddler bed or big kid bed during this stage. This transition can sometimes disrupt sleep temporarily as toddlers adjust to the new sleep environment. Providing a consistent bedtime routine and reassuring your toddler with extra comfort and attention can help ease this transition.



Safe Sleep Spaces

Floor Bed or Toddler Bed:

- Floor beds and toddler beds allow your child to get into and out of bed independently.
- While these beds tend to be low to the ground, you may still consider a bed rail to prevent your child from falling out of the bed.
- A soft area rug next to the bed may also add an extra layer of safety in case of a fall.
- The inclusion of a small pillow, a soft toy, and blanket are now considered safe options since your child is now over the age of one.

Crib:

- For younger toddlers, a crib may still be a safe choice for sleep, as long as they are not able to climb out.
 - **If your toddler is climbing out of their crib, opt to transition to a toddler bed, floor bed, etc. to reduce the risk of physical injury.**
- The inclusion of a small pillow, a soft toy, and/or blanket are now considered safe options since your child is now over the age of one.





Caregiver's Chest (Nap Only):

- One of the most preferred places for your toddler to sleep may still be on you! The closeness of their caregiver offers a familiar scent, familiar sounds (heartbeat & breathing), while also providing them with a sense of warmth and touch.
- When having your toddler nap on or next to you, ensure you can remain awake the entire time to practice best safety.

Stroller (Nap Only):

- Toddlers and caregivers can benefit greatly from some fresh air! Take your little one on a daytime stroll around the neighborhood in comfortable stroller that may promote some outdoor sleep.
- Ensure your stroller is equipped with a canopy to block strong sun and wind.



Nightmares & Night Terrors

Nightmares and night terrors are both common sleep disturbances in children, but they differ in their characteristics, timing, and the child's response. Nightmares are frightening dreams that occur during REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, typically during the latter part of the night. Children may wake up from nightmares feeling scared or upset and may seek comfort from parents or caregivers. Parents can comfort a child after a nightmare by reassuring them, providing comfort objects, and staying with them until they feel safe.

On the other hand, night terrors are episodes of intense fear or terror that occur during non-REM sleep, usually within the first few hours after falling asleep. Children experiencing night terrors may scream, thrash around, or appear highly agitated, but they usually have no memory of the episode upon waking. Attempts to comfort a child during a night terror may not be effective, and the episode typically resolves on its own. Parents can ensure the child's safety during a night terror by gently guiding them back to bed and staying nearby until the episode passes.

Aspect	Nightmares	Night Terrors
Age of Onset	Typically begin around age 2-4 years old	Typically begin around age 3-8 years old
Occurrence	Occur during REM sleep	Occur during non-REM sleep (usually within the first few hours of sleep)
Child's Awareness	Child is usually aware of the nightmare and may wake up crying or afraid	Child is often unaware of the night terror and may not remember it the next morning
Response	Child may seek comfort and reassurance from a caregiver	Child may appear confused or disoriented and may not respond to attempts at comfort
Duration	Short-lived, lasting only a few minutes	Typically brief but can last several minutes to half an hour
Comforting Approach	Provide verbal reassurance, offer physical comfort, and engage in calming bedtime routines	Ensure the child's safety, gently guide them back to bed, and provide reassurance afterward

Tips for Better Sleep

Establish Consistent and Reliable

Nighttime Routines: Creating a predictable bedtime routine helps signal to your child's body that it's time to wind down. Activities such as taking a warm bath, brushing teeth, and reading a book can create a calming atmosphere and make the transition to sleep smoother. Consistency is key; stick to the routine every night, maintaining the same sleep schedule even on weekends to help regulate their internal clock. This predictability provides children with a sense of security and stability, which is crucial for their overall well-being. Moreover, consistent bedtime routines help reinforce the body's natural sleep-wake cycle, making it easier for children to fall asleep and wake up refreshed.



Create a Safe Sleep Environment: Ensure the area around your toddler's sleep space is clear of any potential hazards. Remove or secure cords, pictures, shelves, or any objects that could pose a risk of injury or strangulation. Keep the sleep space simple and free of clutter to promote a safe and peaceful sleep environment for your toddler.





Increase Outdoor Time and Encourage Physical Activity: Ensure your child gets plenty of outdoor playtime during the day. Natural light exposure supports the regulation of circadian rhythms, helping children feel more awake during the day and sleepy at night. Regular physical activity also helps children fall asleep faster and enjoy deeper sleep. Encouraging outdoor play not only promotes physical health but also enhances mood and reduces stress levels, both of which contribute to better sleep quality. Being outside in natural light during the day helps to solidify the connection between daylight and wakefulness, thus reinforcing nighttime sleepiness.

Avoid Blue Light and Create a Sleep-Friendly Environment: Limit exposure to screens (like tablets and TVs) at least two hours before bedtime. Blue light from screens can deplete melatonin levels, a hormone that regulates sleep, making it harder for your child to fall asleep. Additionally, make the bedroom conducive to sleep by keeping it cool, dark, and quiet. Consider using blackout curtains and white noise machines if necessary to block out disruptive light and sounds.



Empower with Choices: Allowing children to make age-appropriate choices within a fixed boundary offers them a sense of control and independence. For example, letting them choose their pajamas or select a bedtime story gives them ownership over their bedtime routine. This not only fosters decision-making skills but also promotes a sense of responsibility and self-confidence. By setting clear boundaries around bedtime while still providing choices, children feel respected and empowered, leading to a smoother bedtime transition.



Prioritize Nap Time: Prioritizing nap time for toddlers is crucial for their overall well-being and development. Naps provide toddlers with the opportunity to recharge and refresh their bodies and minds, helping them stay alert, focused, and happy throughout the day. Adequate daytime rest also plays a key role in supporting cognitive function, memory consolidation, and emotional regulation in toddlers. Don't skip or reduce naps with the hope of an earlier bedtime. While it might seem counterintuitive, toddlers actually need regular naps to support their overall sleep health. When toddlers miss out on naps, they can become overtired, leading to difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep at night. Stick to a consistent nap schedule to ensure your toddler gets the rest they need for optimal growth, development, and nighttime sleep.



Avoid Food and Drinks After Dinner: Try to avoid giving your child food or drinks after dinner. This allows for proper digestion and prevents spikes in insulin levels, which can interfere with the release of growth hormones critical for development during sleep. Sometimes, children may request a snack or drink as a way to prolong going to sleep. In such cases, it's important to enforce boundaries gently but firmly, reassuring them that they will eat/drink at breakfast. Eating late can cause discomfort and indigestion, making it harder for children to settle down for the night. Limiting sugary snacks and drinks in the evening also helps prevent energy spikes that can delay sleep onset and disturb sleep throughout the night.

