

Toddlerhood



NUTRITION PROGRAM

How to help your toddler sleep well

Even with a well-established regular bedtime routine, there may be times when your toddler's sleep is disrupted. Try these ideas to help deal with some of the common causes so you and your little

one can enjoy a peaceful night's sleep.

5 mins

to read

▪ By Danial Ahmad , Author

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Help! My little one often drifts off in my arms when I read him a story at the end of our nighttime routine. Before, I was able to transfer him to his bed and he'd go to sleep straight away. Now, when I try and put him down, he wakes up fully and cries until I pick him up again. Is there anything I can do?

Try... Putting him to bed when you notice he is getting tired, and before he falls asleep. Settle him with his favourite soft toy, and stay in the room to soothe him. Your toddler may be relying on being held while he falls asleep, and is having trouble falling asleep on his own. With you in the room, your toddler has the reassurance that you're near, without needing to be held. Gradually shorten the amount of time you stay in the room. Keep checking on him if you need to. It might not work the first time, but keep trying to get into a regular routine and, over time, he'll learn to fall asleep on his own.

Help! It's getting increasingly difficult to get my toddler to go to sleep when I tell him it's time. What started out as a request for one more story has now progressed to about three more stories, a drink of water, and as many stuffed animals as he can fit in his bed! The list goes on.

Try... Pre-empting some of his requests and working them into his regular bedtime routine to keep him happy. This behaviour is common, and a sign of your toddler becoming more independent. He's developing a mind of his own, and learning how to test boundaries. Be sure to recognise what is happening and set limits on his demands.

Help! After months of sleeping through the night, my toddler is suddenly waking up again. He's upset and cries out for me until I go into his room and pick him up. I really thought we'd gotten past this stage. How can I solve this, I'm exhausted?

Try... Reassuring your little one that you are close by. One of the main causes of night waking is a change of routine, so think: has he been ill, have you recently traveled away from home, or is he in a new bedroom? If he's in an unfamiliar environment, he might need some extra comforting. Try to resist the temptation of picking him up as he'll then associate falling asleep with being in your arms, and may struggle to do it on his own. If he's been ill, you'll no doubt have given him more attention during the night than you usually would and he may have become used to this. Since his usual bedtime routine has been disrupted, gradually return to the pattern that was familiar for him.

Help! My almost two-year-old still has two naps a day—I know I should probably reduce this to one, but I find those “bonus hours” when he's asleep during the day really useful for getting chores done. Is this OK to continue?

Try... Taking cues from him about napping. If he is still taking two naps and sleeping well at night, there is no need to make any changes. Some toddlers do cut down to just one nap a day at around 18 months, but there's no right or wrong.

Help! My toddler wakes up very early. He might think 5am is a reasonable time to start the day but I'm not so sure!

Try... Going into his room when he cries out to offer reassurance and check that he is alright. He may be content to play with a toy for a little while, if he no longer seems sleepy. If you don't already have them, consider installing blackout blinds, which may help your toddler sleep for longer, especially in the summer months when it's lighter. Add up your toddler's total amount of sleep in a day. If he is waking at 5am having had 11-14 hours' total sleep in 24 hours, then he may just be an early riser. In this case, you may want to think about moving your bedtime earlier, if possible, to ensure you are fully rested.

Help! I read that toddlers should be getting 11-14 hours of sleep a day. Mine definitely isn't. Should I be worried?

Try... Following a regular bedtime sleep routine for your child, if you aren't already. Remember that this 11-14 hours guideline is total sleep in 24 hours, so it includes daytime naps too. You might be surprised to find that he is getting more than you think when you add it all together. Setting a regular bedtime, and getting ready for bed in the same way every night, will help your toddler learn what to expect. This could include having a bath, followed by massage, and getting into his pyjamas. He could have a drink of water while you read him a story or sing a lullaby, and you could give him his favourite stuffed toy to keep him company. Finally, give him a big hug and a kiss goodnight. If your toddler has any special requests, you can work these into his routine too—as long as you do the same thing every night.

Sources

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