

# WHY SLEEP?

*Sleep helps children  
grow*



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
CHILDREN'S BUREAU

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## HOW DOES YOUR CHILD SLEEP?

Does your child sleep long enough and soundly enough? Is he rested when he wakes, or is he still tired? Does he go to bed happily every night at the same early hour, or does he tease you into letting him stay up late? Does he play hard all day without a rest so that he is too tired to sleep well at night, or does he get a daytime nap as well as a long peaceful night sleep? Does he go to sleep as soon as he goes to bed or does he lie awake, turning and tossing? In short, is your child getting all the help from sleep that he should, or is he struggling along on a starvation allowance of sleep?

If your child were starving for food—if you had not enough food to give him or if he would not eat—would you expect him to be healthy, cheerful, and easy to get along with? No; you would expect him to be undernourished and pale, irritable, and hard to manage. But many a child is starving for sleep; yet his mother wonders why he does not grow properly, why he is naughty, why he is undernourished, or why he seems stupid. Many a mother sees that her child is overactive and restless and hears him say that he is not sleepy, and she thinks, therefore, that he is not tired, that if he needed sleep he would go to bed readily. Such a mother does not realize that the very child who does not want to go to bed may be the one who needs sleep most.

Enough sound sleep is one of the three essentials for a child's health; the other two are right food and outdoor play in the sun. These three essentials depend on one another. If a child gets plenty of simple food and vigorous outdoor play in the sun, he is likely to sleep well. If his diet is improper and he sits around indoors all day he may sleep poorly. If his sleep is disturbed or too short he may be tired and unable to make the best use of his food, and as a result may be undersized or underweight, even though he is not underfed.

If your child is well grown, if he has firm muscles, rounded outlines, erect posture, a rosy skin, clear eyes without circles under them, a happy disposition, and a good appetite he is probably getting the right kind and amount of sleep.

### SLEEP AND SUN ARE AS NECESSARY AS FOOD

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## HOW MUCH SHOULD YOUR CHILD SLEEP?

A child grows most when asleep. When he is awake the food that he has eaten is used to supply him with energy for his play and other activities. When he is asleep his activities are cut down to almost nothing, and his food can be used to renew the tissues that have been worn out by the day's play and to build new tissues. The building of new tissue is called growing. If the child gets too little sleep his growth is hindered.

The faster a child is growing, the more sleep he needs. (Adults need less sleep than children because they have stopped growing.) A baby less than a year old grows very fast and therefore sleeps most of the time. When he gets a little older he does not grow so fast and therefore does not need so much sleep. After about a dozen years, when the child enters the adolescent stage, growth speeds up again, and this older boy or girl needs even more sleep than the child a year or two younger. Many parents do not know this and permit these older children to stay up later than the younger ones. As a result boys and girls 13 to 15 are often listless and inert. They may be sleepy and tired most of the time, and unable to concentrate on their lessons.

Steady loss of sleep is bad for a child's mental and physical development. A full allowance of unbroken hours of restful sleep helps normal bodily growth and alert mentality.

#### SLEEP REQUIRED BY THE AVERAGE YOUNG CHILD (Including daytime sleep)

At birth	At 6 months	At 1 year	2-5 years
21-22 hours	18 hours	16 hours	14 hours

#### SLEEP REQUIRED BY THE AVERAGE OLDER CHILD

6-7 years	8-10 years	11-12 years
12 hours	11 hours	10-11 hours

#### SLEEP REQUIRED BY THE AVERAGE YOUTH

13-15 years	16-18 years
10-12 hours	9-10 hours

### HOW MUCH DOES YOUR CHILD SLEEP?

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## THE HABIT OF THE EARLY BED HOUR

Sleeping at regular hours is a habit that you must start for a new baby. If you accustom your child to a regular bedtime from infancy you not only help his chances for normal development of body and mind but also simplify your own problems of child management, for, as years pass, your child will continue to go quietly, unquestioningly to bed. Almost all children who go to bed unwillingly or sleep too little have not been trained properly in early infancy.

The habit of an unbroken night sleep—from 6 p. m. to 6 a. m.—can be established fairly early in the baby's life. Most newborn babies sleep all day and all night, waking only to be fed. Give your child a good start by training him to sleep through the night without a feeding as soon as he can do this and still continue to develop normally. For the first nine months most babies need a feeding at 10 p. m., and for the first two months some babies need also a 2 a. m. feeding, but by the end of the ninth month the unbroken night sleep should last from 6 p. m. to 6 a. m. If a child has the habit of wetting the bed it may be necessary to wake him to go to the toilet. (See *Child Management*, Children's Bureau Publication 143, pp. 11-17.) The habit of a 12-hour night sleep, with regular daytime naps or rest periods in addition, should be continued until the child is at least 7 years old.

The early bedtime habit—6 o'clock during infancy and not later than 7 throughout early childhood—should be unbroken. If the rule is clung to without any exceptions, evening entertainments such as movies will never be in the child's program and they will not be expected.

Do not keep the child up to entertain visitors, and do not allow him to stay up because he begs to. It is unwise to give in to a whining child, and permitting him to lose sleep in this way leads to a vicious circle: Loss of sleep makes him irritable and overactive, and overactivity makes him restless and wakeful, so that on following evenings it becomes harder and harder to get him to go to bed. On the other hand a child who goes to bed tranquilly is likely to sleep well and to be easy to manage the next day. Clashes between parent and child are often due to the fact that the child is worn out from lack of sleep.

### A TIRED CHILD IS A TROUBLESOME CHILD

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## THE DAY'S EFFECT ON THE NIGHT'S SLEEP

Your child's night rest depends largely upon how he has spent the day. An exciting day, without a nap, may leave a child literally too tired to sleep. Especially should the end of the day be free from excitement. The half hour before bedtime should be devoted to quiet pleasures, without romping, exciting games or stories, or any activities that are stimulating.

Proper rest in the daytime helps to give the child a good night sleep. The young baby gets plenty of day and night sleep. As he grows older his waking hours are longer, and the mother should see that his main sleep is at night, and that he gets also two daytime naps, a long one in the morning and a short one in the early afternoon. As a rule by the second year only one nap need be taken in the daytime—a long one, at whatever time of day is most convenient for the mother; such as 10 or 11 in the morning or after the midday meal. In winter the forenoon hour would seem best so that the child may have the midday hours for play in the sun. The nap should not last later than 2.30 in the afternoon, lest it keep the child from sleeping at night. Even if the child does not sleep he should spend the nap time in bed undressed. The daily nap or rest period should be kept up until the child is 7 years old.

Most babies can learn to take daytime naps outdoors in the sunshine if their eyes are shaded and care is taken that the skin is not burned. On very hot days the baby should not be put in the sun in the middle hours of the day. (See *Sunlight for Babies*, Children's Bureau Folder No. 5.) Sleeping in the sun gives the baby the benefit of the sun's rays, but if the bright sunlight or the noise in the yard keeps him from sleeping he may have to take his naps on the porch or in the house. If the baby's long nap is taken in the shade the day's program must be arranged so that he will get his sun baths when awake. A child past the second year should take his nap in his own bed.

### ALL LITTLE CHILDREN NEED A DAILY NAP

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## DOES YOUR CHILD HATE BEDTIME?

If your child has the habit of staying up late it will be hard to break it, but you can do it. Ask yourself first why the child does not want to go to bed.

Has bedtime pleasant associations for the child? If you put him to bed as a punishment when he is naughty, he will feel that there is something unpleasant about going to bed. If you have done this in the past it will be hard to change this idea, but you can at least give up using bed as a punishment. Do not let him feel that he is missing pleasure by going to bed. Go into his room with him and stay till he is tucked in. Then leave him alone, but do not seem in a hurry to get away. If the child is afraid of the dark do not leave a light burning in his room, but do not expect him to sleep with his room completely dark until he has learned to conquer his fear. A little light from a street lamp, or from the hall through a partly closed door, not shining in his eyes, may help. If he has other fears that make him dislike being in his room alone, help him to conquer them. (See Child Management, pp. 22-24.)

Does the child get his daytime nap regularly? If not he may be wakeful at bedtime.

Do you always put the child to bed at a regular hour? If not, begin to-night to put him to bed at the hour that you have decided on, and make no exceptions. Treat bedtime in a matter-of-fact way; do not argue about it. Give the child warning about five minutes before bedtime, so that he can come to a stopping place in what he is doing. Do not announce bedtime too suddenly.

Do both parents try to make the half hour before the child's bedtime a time of quiet play, without exciting games or stories? Active play during the day makes children pleasantly tired, but just before bedtime it makes them wide awake.

Are you firm about the child's staying in bed quietly after you leave him? If he keeps calling to you and asking for a drink of water or anything else that will get your attention, teach him that this will not work. See that all necessities are attended to before the child finally is tucked into bed; then ignore all calls from him, unless you think there is a real emergency.

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## DOES YOUR CHILD SLEEP FITFULLY?

If your child goes to bed readily but stays awake or sleeps fitfully, find out the cause of his poor sleep.

Has he had enough active play during the day to tire his muscles?

Is his physical condition good? Ask the doctor about this. Enlarged or diseased adenoids or tonsils or other defects may keep a child from sleeping well.

Does the child have a bed to himself? Children in bed together may stay awake to play. Any bed that is large enough to hold two children can be replaced by two cots in which they can sleep separately. For many reasons it is important that every child should sleep alone. For a baby it is easy to make a clothes basket or a large box into a comfortable bed.

Is the room at a comfortable temperature (45° to 55° F. in winter, and as cool as possible in summer), with plenty of fresh air from open windows?

Is the bed comfortable? The spring and the mattress should be firm and flat, not sagging in the middle. If a pillow is used it should be thin and not too soft. The sheets should be large, so that the edges will stay tucked in all night; the blankets light in weight and wide enough to keep out drafts. For a child who kicks off the covers try a sleeping bag.

Are the child's nightclothes comfortable? Are they loose, so that they do not bind the child anywhere? Of course the child should be entirely undressed before his nightclothes are put on.

Is the child's supper satisfying and easily digestible, so that his sleep will not be disturbed by hunger or indigestion? Keep him from drinking much liquid at night; a full bladder may make him wakeful.

Do you try to prevent loud or sudden noises from reaching the child's room? The house need not be hushed at night, and you should train your child to sleep through ordinary talking or other minor disturbances, but his bedroom should be as far as possible from the radio. Early-morning noises should be prevented as much as possible, for sleep in the early morning is lighter than the first sleep at night.

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## IS YOUR CHILD GETTING RESTFUL SLEEP?

Study your child's sleep, not only counting the hours that he sleeps but also asking yourself whether these hours are restful. If a child falls asleep in your arms—at the movies or in an automobile—his position is cramped and the surroundings are not restful.

Put your child to bed by the clock. Try keeping a chart some week, noting each day the time the child goes to bed. In summer, when much of the evening is light, especially where daylight-saving time is observed, be sure that the child goes to bed at his regular time by the clock. If he is used to taking daytime naps he should have no trouble in sleeping before dark. If an illness breaks the routine, get back to regular habits as soon as possible.

Train your child not to be finicky about sleeping. While he is a baby teach him to go to sleep without rocking him, singing him to sleep, letting him keep anything in his mouth, or other coddling that will be hard to stop later.

Teach your child to associate sleep with going to bed. Be sure he is awake when you put him into bed and do not let him form the habit of falling asleep anywhere else.

Try to prevent loud or sudden noises. These are nerve-wearing on a child at any time; and they may prevent sleep and cause unnecessary fears. A child in noisy surroundings tends to sleep and wake fitfully and may be unrefreshed even if he has been in bed long enough to have had plenty of sleep.

Do your part in preventing unnecessary noise in the neighborhood. Do not let your older children roller-skate or shout in the evening in the yard or street. Join with your neighbors in taking a stand against unnecessary noise in such early-morning activities as milk delivery and garbage collection and in making your block or apartment house fairly quiet at night.

