



Time for Bed

Just like adults, children need their sleep. When they do not sleep well, they feel unhappy or frustrated. They cry a lot and nothing seems to satisfy them for long. Getting enough sleep can also be a concern for many parents. Over time, your baby will gradually sleep longer during the night.

Your Baby

For the first few months, your baby may sleep for about 15 hours of every 24 hours. Newborn babies will usually not sleep longer than 2 or 3 hours at a time. In the early days, it is common for babies to wake up several times at night for feeding. Getting enough sleep can be a concern for many parents.

Breastfeeding is the best way to get your baby back to sleep. Over time, your baby will gradually sleep longer during the night.

To help your baby learn sleeping patterns, you can do the following:

- Have a clear difference between daytime and night-time sleeping.
- Have a regular night-time routine. This may not be possible in the first few months. As your baby gets older, give her a warm bath at night followed by cuddling or singing a lullaby and having some quiet time. Feed your child before bedtime. This signals to your baby that it is time to sleep.
- When you are up at night to feed your baby, keep the room dark and quiet. Try not to stimulate your baby before putting him back down to sleep.
- During the day, let your baby sleep in a lightened room with normal daytime noises.

- Always place your baby on her back to sleep on a firm and safe sleep surface. Babies should never be placed to sleep on couches, waterbeds, sheepskin, or soft surfaces like pillows.

The Toddler Years

Ages 1 to 3 years are when children discover and start expressing their independence. They want to make their own decisions, so naps and bedtimes can be a challenge. We know that babies and children usually respond well to very structured bedtime routines with some decision-making of their own. Think about designing a routine that suits you and your child. The routine helps slow the child down enough to sleep.

Many children between 1 and 3 years of age wake up during the night at least once a week. The child's waking at night peaks between 18 months to 2 years and then decreases over time.

Sleep Safety

The Canadian Paediatric Society recommends that the safest place to sleep for children under 12 months of age is in their own crib. Your child should sleep on his or her back in a crib that meets the Canadian government's safety standards. Bed sharing where a child sleeps on the same sleeping surface or bed with any person is not recommended. Bed sharing increases the risk of suffocation. Room sharing, also called co-sleeping, is when your child is within arm's reach of you but on a separate sleeping surface. Room sharing is recommended for the first 6 months and can protect against Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

For more information on safety and sleeping, see *Baby's Best Chance* and *Toddler's First Steps*. Visit the Best Chance website at

www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca. See also HealthLink BC File [#46 Sudden Infant Death Syndrome \(SIDS\)](#).

Good Sleep Habits

You can help your child develop good sleep habits. Keep regular day and bedtime routines. Here are some tips on how you can help your child:

- Try to set up regular daytime routines and habits. Your child likes routine.
- Keep a regular nap schedule, even on weekends.
- Provide regular meals and snacks during the day.
- Wind down action at bedtime.
- Avoid watching television before bedtime, which is stimulating and not relaxing.
- Make bedtime a special time and talk about the day for a few moments.
- Give your child some choices at bedtime – for example, which story to read or pyjamas to wear.
- Teach your child it is bedtime by putting her into bed awake.
- Keep the sleeping area quiet, and make sure you check regularly until your child falls asleep.

Regular Bedtime Routines

For toddlers, you can use these ideas for bedtime routines:

- Put your child to bed at the same time every night
- Communicate and let your child know when it is bedtime – for example, “After we tidy up the toys, we will get ready for sleep time.”
- Give your child a bath and some choice – for example, “Would you like bubbles in your bath tonight or no bubbles?”
- Get ready for bed and brush your child’s teeth.

- You can cuddle together, make up a story about your child’s day, and ask for ideas or input. For example, Jason woke up early this morning and the first thing he did was crawl into bed with his daddy. Then he went for breakfast. What did he eat? Small children love stories where they are the star character.
- Repeat the phrase “Now it is sleep time” while your child is tucked into bed. Sing a favourite song, or read a bedtime story.
- Play music in the background.

Most families find that a happy bedtime routine combines both what the child and the parents need. An established bedtime routine also makes it easier for other people to put your child to bed. Make sure they understand every step of the routine.

If your child will not settle down or sleep or wakes up in the night, repeat the last step in the bedtime routine. For example, sing a song while you give your child a hug or cuddle, and then repeat the phrase “Now it is sleep time.”

For More Information

More HealthLink BC Files on child development:

[92a Your Child and Play](#)

[92b Your Child’s Development From Birth to Three Years](#)

[92c Your Child’s Feelings](#)

[92d Toilet Training](#)

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.