

## Time for Bed

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

### How can I get my baby to sleep?

For the first few months, your baby may sleep for about 15 out of every 24 hours. Newborn babies usually sleep for 2 or 3 hours at a time. In the early months, most babies wake up several times at night for feeding.

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 regular nighttime routine. This may not be possible in the first few months. As your baby gets older, give them a warm bath at night, followed by reading a story, 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 them back down to sleep.
- Have a clear difference between daytime and nighttime sleeping. During the day, let your baby sleep in a lightened room with normal daytime noises. During the night, keep the room dark and quiet.
- Always place your baby on their 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.

### How can I get my toddler to sleep?

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 may be a challenge. We know that babies and children usually respond well to structured bedtime routines with some decision-making of their own. Think about designing a routine that suits you and your child. This routine can help slow your child down enough to sleep.

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

### How can I make sure that my child is safe when they are sleeping?

The safest place to sleep for children under 12 months of age is in their own crib. Your child should sleep on their back in a crib. Cribs should be made after 1986 and meet the federal government's Crib, Cradles and Bassinets Regulations. Visit Healthy Families BC for more information on safe sleeping [www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/home/articles/safe-sleeping](http://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/home/articles/safe-sleeping).

Bed sharing is where a child sleeps on the same sleeping surface or bed with another person. Bed sharing is not recommended as it increases the risk of suffocation.

Room sharing is when your child is within 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). Keeping your baby's environment smoke free is also important for reducing the risk of SIDS. For more information on SIDS, see [HealthLinkBC File #46 Sudden Infant Death Syndrome \(SIDS\)](#).

## How can I help my child develop good sleep habits?

You can help your child develop good sleep habits by keeping 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. Children like routine.
- Keep a regular nap schedule, even on weekends.
- Provide regular meals and snacks during the day.
- Slow down activity 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 which pyjamas to wear.
- Help your child learn to fall asleep on their own by putting them into bed while they are sleepy but still awake.
- Keep the sleeping area quiet, and check on them regularly until they fall asleep.

## What are some ideas for a regular bedtime routine?

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

- Put your child to bed at the same time every night.
- 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 main character.
- Play soft music quietly in the background.
- Repeat the phrase “Now it is sleep time” while your child is tucked into bed. Sing a favourite song, or read a bedtime story.

Most families find that a happy bedtime routine combines what the child and the parents need. An established bedtime routine also makes it easier for other people to put your child to bed.

If your child will not go to 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

For more information about child development, see the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC File #92a Your Child and Play From Birth to 3 Years](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92b Your Child’s Development From Birth to 3 Years](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92c Your Child’s Feelings](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92d Toilet Learning](#)