|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Age | Nighttime sleep | Daytime sleep | Average total sleep |
| 2 years | 10.5 to 12.5 hours | 1 to 3 hours (1 nap) | 11.5 to 15.5 hours |
| 3 years | 10.5 to 12.5 hours | 1 to 3 hours (1 nap) | 11 to 14 hours |
| 4 years | 10 to 12 hours | 0 to 2.5 hours (1 or no nap) | 10 to 13 hours |
| 5 years | 10 to 12 hours | 0 to 2.5 hours (1 or no nap) | 10 to 12.5 hours |
| 6 years | 10 to 11.5 hours | none | 10 to 11.5 hours |
| 7 years | 9.5 to 11.5 hours | none | 9.5 to 11.5 hours |
| 8 years | 9.5 to 11.5 hours | none | 9.5 to 11.5 hours |

 INFORMATION FROM THE BABY CENTER: \* Note: The two sets of numbers don't always add up because children who take longer naps tend to sleep fewer hours at night, and vice versa.

Keep in mind that most kids need a *lot* of sleep — usually more than parents allow for. Often, says BabyCenter sleep expert Jodi Mindell, author of *Sleeping Through the Night*, if a child has poor sleep habits or refuses to nap or go to bed before 10 at night, his parents will assume that he just doesn't need much sleep. That's probably not the case — in fact, it's likely that such a child is actually sleep-*deprived,* hence his hyper, overtired behavior at bedtime. To see whether your child falls into this camp, ask yourself:

* Does my child frequently fall asleep while riding in the car?
* Do I have to wake him almost every morning?
* Does he seem cranky, irritable, or overtired during the day?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, your child may be getting less sleep than his body craves. To change this pattern, you'll need to help him develop good sleep habits, and set an appropriate bedtime and then stick to it. A preschooler or young grade-schooler who's outgrown napping needs a solid 11 to 12 hours of sleep a night, and that amount will gradually decrease as he gets older. Even so, by the time he's a teenager, your child will still need nine to ten hours of shut-eye a night.

## When will my child stop needing a nap?

When is it okay for my child to stop napping? And what should I do if he wants to stop before I want him to?

## Expert Answers

[**Jodi Mindell**](http://www.babycenter.com/viewExpertBio.htm?id=14)**, pediatric sleep expert**

By age 2, most toddlers have given up their morning nap but still need an afternoon snooze to see them through the day. About a quarter of kids stop napping altogether by the age of 3, another half between ages of 3 and 4, with the final quarter continuing to nap until they're 5 or 6.

That said, napping needs differ from one child to another. How much daytime sleep — if any — your child requires depends in part on how many hours he sleeps during the night (although many kids need to nap no matter how much sleep they get at night). But in general, kids this age do best with a total of 12 to 14 hours of sleep in each 24-hour period. So if your child goes to bed at 8 p.m. and sleeps until 8 a.m., he may get his full quota of rest all at once. (For more on how much sleep children need at different ages, [click here](http://www.babycenter.com/0_how-much-sleep-does-your-child-need_64915.bc).) Also, don't be surprised if your child goes back to taking a nap weeks or even months after stopping, especially if there's a change in his routine or he's more active during the day as a result of school or other scheduled activities.

If your child gets fewer than 12 hours of sleep at night, then ideally he should continue to nap. But you may find that as he gets older, it's increasingly difficult to get him down to sleep during the day. Toddlers and preschoolers are so intent on discovering their world that they hate to miss out on anything going on around them — even when they're running on fumes. If your child is usually at home with you during the day, make sure he naps in the same place he sleeps at night, since he already associates that spot with sleep and he's more likely to doze off there. If he normally naps at daycare or preschool, keep your weekend routine consistent with theirs and tuck him in with the same stuffed animal he usually sleeps with at school.

If a child under age 4 [refuses to nap](http://www.babycenter.com/0_refusing-to-nap-why-it-happens-and-what-to-do-about-it_63771.bc) altogether, at least try to enforce some quiet time every day. Tell him that kids rest after lunch so they have the energy to play later on. Let him take some toys and books to bed with him, then dim the lights or draw the curtains and leave the room. Although he won't feel as rejuvenated as he would if he slept, an hour or two's break from rambunctious play will help shore up his energies — and yours

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**Introduction**

If only babies arrived with a personal napping manual. Then you'd know whether you have a child who will happily take daily naps until preschool or the type who will abandon them altogether by age 3. You would be able to count on having free time every afternoon instead of wondering whether you'll be able to squeeze in a shower. Unfortunately, there's no way of knowing how well your little one will nap-or until what age. But there are some things you can do to encourage healthy napping. Here, we answer all your questions about daytime sleep.

**Why is it important for kids to nap?**

Aside from the obvious fact that you need time to check your e-mail, make a phone call, or clean up the house, naps are critical to growing children. "Research suggests that physical and mental development takes place when kids sleep-both at night and during the day," says Daniel Lewin, Ph.D., director of pediatric behavioral sleep medicine at Children's National Medical Center, in Washington, D.C.

What's more, studies find that kids who nap have longer attention spans and are less fussy than those who don't. And perhaps the best reason of all: When kids rest during the day, they tend to sleep longer and more peacefully at night.

**Can I teach my child to be a good napper?**

Some experts suspect that children may be genetically programmed to take short or long naps. Studies have found that twins raised in the same environment often nap for varying lengths of time. So it's unlikely that a child who is a naturally short napper can be transformed into one who takes three-hour siestas every day.

But there are some things you can do to encourage good napping habits: Avoid keeping a child up too late at night, which can prevent him from sleeping well during the day. And don't wait too long to begin his nap. Also, rocking or nursing a child to sleep at naptime is a mistake. It may lead him to refuse to fall asleep on his own or to wake up as soon as the comforting stops, says Parents adviser Jodi Mindell, Ph.D., author of Sleeping Through the Night. "It's best to put your child down when he's awake," she says. "If he fusses, check on him and reassure him as often as you feel is necessary, but don't take him out of his crib. Eventually, he'll learn to fall asleep on his own."

**Should we stick to a strict nap schedule?**

While you don't want to become a slave to your child's nap habits, experts say it's helpful to maintain a consistent routine. "The more regular a child's naptime, waking time, and bedtime are, the more likely it'll be that his internal clock will run smoothly and that he'll fall asleep more quickly and easily," Dr. Mindell says.

This doesn't mean, however, that you can't break from the schedule when you're away from home or when you've got special plans. "If your child is well rested, skipping a nap occasionally for a birthday party or an outing won't cause problems," says Chicago pediatrician Marc Weissbluth, M.D., author of Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child. As for vacations, even toddlers can understand that there are different rules that apply when the family is away from home. Most kids will resume their regular nap schedule if you stick to it when you return.

**If my baby takes only one nap a day, when should he take it?**

Wouldn't it be nice if parents had control over such decisions? For nearly all children, the morning nap disappears sometime between 12 and 21 months, Dr. Weissbluth says. The exception is when a child goes to sleep too late at night and wakes up tired. Then, he's likely to nap during the morning hours and may not fall asleep again in the afternoon. That's a sign that he needs to get to bed earlier in the evenings.

The best time for a single nap is early afternoon. "Don't let your child sleep past three or four o'clock," Dr. Mindell advises. "You should allow for at least four hours between the end of an afternoon nap and bedtime."

**When do kids stop napping completely?**

Studies show that many children stop taking naps at around age 4, but some experts say that may be too soon. "Daytime sleep remains important for kids during the preschool years and even throughout kindergarten," Dr. Mindell says. If your child falls asleep easily at naptime, it's a sign he still needs a daytime snooze. The following are indications that it's time to stop:

* Your child is consistently fidgety and restless at naptime.
* He doesn't have meltdowns in the late afternoon when he misses his nap.
* When he does nap, he has a hard time going to sleep at his regular bedtime.