



The Children's Doctor

All you need to know about... Sleep Requirements for Children



How much sleep does my baby need?

In general, new babies require 16-18 hours of sleep in every 24 hour period. Each period of sleep may be from 2-4 hours initially. Over the first month, babies learn daylight and dark cycles resulting in more wakefulness during the day by 4 weeks of age with longer sleep periods overnight.

By 12 months of age, most babies will require 14-15 hours of sleep in every 24 hour period. This usually consists of 2 day sleeps of about 2 hours duration and an extended sleep period overnight. Children will usually drop to one daytime sleep at about 18 months of age with an extension of night time sleep to compensate. Most children will lose their daytime sleep with the introduction of school or preschool.

At 5-12 years of age, children require a minimum of 10 hours sleep in every 24 hour period. This is usually achieved overnight with minimal interruption.

How can I settle my baby to sleep?

Routine is important in establishing good sleep behaviour. Allow a wind-down period before bedtime. This should involve calming activities such as a bath, a massage, a story or lots of cuddles. Ensure that your baby is comfortable, has a clean nappy, is warm (not hot or cold) and is not hungry. At bedtime, wrap your baby in a light cotton wrap which measures at least 1m squared. Babies usually like being wrapped very tightly. Make sure your baby is placed in the cot whilst still awake. Do not rock or cuddle your baby to sleep. By putting your baby to bed whilst awake, the baby will learn to settle herself when she stirs during the night.

Most importantly, do not wait until your baby is overtired as this will make bedtime more difficult. Always put your baby to bed at the first sign of tiredness.

What are the signs of tiredness?

All babies are different. Sometimes tired signs are obvious to everyone but other times the signs of tiredness will be very subtle. You will get to know your babies tired signs.

Some common tired signs include:

- irritability
- emotional lability (crying for little reason)
- aggression or tantrums (unprovoked)
- yawning
- twitching of arms/legs
- loss of concentration
- loss of coordination
- some children will "wind up" when overtired and become hyperactive

If you are having trouble settling your baby or toddler, ask for help!
Your GP or Early Childhood Health Clinic will be able to assist you.