

TIP SHEET: **Bedtime Problems**

Ages Affected: 0–5 years old

Your baby needs a certain amount of sleep each day to stay healthy and happy. In fact, some “bad” behavior might be caused by lack of sleep. Just as you might get irritated when you haven’t slept enough, so does your baby!

Bedtime problems start at infancy and do not always end when your child moves from a crib to a bed. As your child gets older, bedtime problems change from crying to whining pleas and refusals.

So how do you get your child to bed through the cries, screams and pleas? How should you respond when you’re awakened in the middle of the night? And how much sleep is enough for your kids?

Here are a few tips:

Babies:

- **One-Two Months:** After the first couple of weeks, infants may sleep for as long as 4 or 5 hours at a time—this is about how long their small bellies can go without food. If babies do sleep most of the night, they may want to eat more frequently during the day.
- **Three Months:** At three months, a baby sleeps about 13 hours in a 24-hour period (4-5 hours of sleep during the day broken into several naps and 8-9 hours at night). About 90 percent of babies this age sleep through the night.
- **Six Months:** At six months your baby should be sleeping through the night on a regular basis. If your baby continues to cry throughout the night, check if she is sick, cold, hungry or wet.

It’s not too early to establish a simple bedtime routine. Any soothing nightly activities, such as a bath, reading a book or singing a song can make up the routine. The goal is for babies to fall asleep on their own, and if they wake up in the middle of the

night, learn to soothe themselves and go back to sleep.

- **Six-Twelve Months:** At six months, an infant may nap about 3 hours during the day and sleep about 9-11 hours at night. At this age, you can begin to change your response to an infant who awakens and cries during the night.

If your baby doesn’t go back to sleep, comfort her without picking her up (talk softly, rub the baby’s back), then leave the room—unless she appears to be sick.

Toddlers:

- From ages 1 to 3, most toddlers sleep about 10-13 hours per night.
- Set regular bedtimes and naptimes. Though most toddlers take naps during the day, you don’t have to force your child to nap. It’s important to schedule some quiet time, even if she does not sleep.
- Continuing his bedtime routine helps your child relax. Just don’t allow rituals to become too long or complicated.
- Active dreaming begins at this age, and for very young children, dreams can be scary. Nightmares are particularly frightening to a toddler. Comfort and hold your child at these times. Let your toddler talk about the dream if she wants to. Stay until your child is calm, then encourage your child to go back to sleep as soon as possible.

Preschoolers:

- Preschoolers sleep about 10-12 hours per night. A preschool child who gets adequate rest at night may no longer need a daytime nap.