

FAMILY WELLNESS

Typical Sleep Patterns for Young Children

- Sleep is Hard
- What's Normal
- Resources to Learn More



Why do we talk about "sleeping like a baby" when babies are so terrible at sleeping?

New parents expect to be up often during the night and experience the challenges of their little ones not sleeping. What often comes as a surprise is how long this phase lasts and how it seems to get better only to then get worse again a few nights later.

The truth that many parents quickly learn is that even after the "baby stage," sleep is a challenging thing for many families. In fact, research consistently shows us that even at 9 months, the majority of children are still waking regularly at night. Unfortunately, families experiencing those

wakings--which are normal and developmentally expected--are often made to feel like they are doing something wrong or need to engage in sleep training to "fix" the problem.

Infants and young babies experience short sleep cycles which lead to frequent waking and short "cat naps." As children age, their sleep cycles lengthen and can even connect into longer stretches of sleep, but often children need comfort in order to fall back asleep at night. This is normal and, while challenging for caregivers, not a "problem" that needs "fixing".

What is Normal Sleep?

All children have different needs. These numbers reflect averages

Infants

At birth, children have no concept of day or night and will sleep for 17-19 hours in a 24 hour period. Spending time outdoors and in natural lighting will help infants learn day/night rhythms.

3-4 Months

Babies of this age sleep for 11-13 hours at night with wakings for feeding and comfort. They average 3-4 hours of sleep during the day across 3-4 nap times.

4-9 Months

Sleep drops down to 9-12 hours at night and 2.5-3 hours of daytime sleep over 3 naps. Night wakings and night feedings still frequent.

9-12 Months

Day and Night sleep remains the same as 4-9 months, however this is a common age for sleep regression with more night wakings and feedings needed.

12-24 Months

At this age, children are sleeping 9-12 hours at night and 1-2 hours during the day across 1-2 naps. Some children begin to connect sleep cycles without adult support, others still need support to fall back asleep after waking in the middle of the night.

2-3 Years

Children sleep 9-12 hours at night and about 1 hour during the day during 1 nap time. Families can expect sleep regressions with any changes--starting school, new baby, potty training, etc.

3-5 Years

Children are still sleeping 9-12 hours, however no longer need naps at some point during this period. Many children begin to sleep independently throughout the night at this age, however it is often a common time for nightmares and night terrors to occur and adult support to be needed.

**"PEOPLE WHO SAY THEY
SLEEP LIKE A BABY USUALLY
DON'T HAVE ONE"**

– LEO J BURKE

Resources

to learn more

- [The Gentle Sleep Book](#) and other resources by [Sarah Ockwell Smith](#)
- 1 hour [Recorded Webinar](#) discussing sleep from birth-3 months
- Typical [Newborn Sleep](#) article
- Tips for when it's time to [wean from night feedings](#)
- Information about sleep specific to [preschool-age children](#)

