



Dr Wolfgang Muller (Consultant Paediatrician)

Parent Information Guide:

Helping Your Baby or Child Sleep Well

Why a Good Sleep Routine Matters

Sleep is essential for your child's growth, development, and emotional wellbeing. A regular bedtime and sleep routine helps your child feel secure, fall asleep more easily, and stay asleep longer.

How Much Sleep Does My Child Need?

Age	Total Sleep in 24 Hours
Newborn (0–3 months)	14–17 hours (irregular)
Infant (4–12 months)	12–16 hours (incl. naps)
Toddler (1–2 years)	11–14 hours (incl. naps)
Preschool (3–5 years)	10–13 hours (incl. naps)

Note: Every child is different, but consistent patterns are helpful for all.

How Much Daytime Naps Should My Child Get?

- Napping typically decreases with age:
 - At 2 years: 1–2 naps/day common
 - By 3–4 years: most children transition to one nap
 - By 5 years: many children drop naps altogether

My advice is to cut daytime naps considerably if your child does not sleep around 10 hours at night after the age of 2 years.



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Establishing a Healthy Bedtime Routine

A calm and predictable routine helps your child wind down for sleep. Aim to follow the same steps every evening, ideally starting 20–30 minutes before bedtime.

Suggested routine:

1. **Wind down:** Quiet play, dim lighting, and turning off screens (TV, tablets) at least 1 hour before bed.
2. **Bath time:** A warm bath can relax and signal that bedtime is near.
3. **Quiet time:** Stories, gentle music, or cuddling help your child feel safe and sleepy.
4. **Bedtime:** Put your child to bed **awake but drowsy** so they learn to settle themselves.

Top Tips for Better Sleep

- **Same time each night** – even at weekends.
- **Comfortable sleep environment:** Quiet, dark or dim room, with a consistent temperature.
- **Avoid late naps** (for toddlers and older children).
- **No bottles or feeds in bed** after teeth brushing. (from 6 months onwards)
- **Avoid screens before bedtime** – the light interferes with melatonin (sleep hormone) production.
- **Move children to their own bedroom if possible and latest by 6 months** – children can be very restless sleepers and both your movements and your child's movements may disturb each other's quality of sleep. If you have a good night sleep you will function far better during the following day.
- **Make bedtime a joyful event** – children sense when you are stressed, under time pressure or dreading the bed routine – make it relaxed, natural and choose suitable activities, reading, soft singing, soft music.
- **Avoid that your child falls asleep while feeding (breast or bottle), being carried around, watching television or similar activities** – children are likely wanting the same stimulus again when they wake up in the middle of the night – so if you carried them until they fall asleep they want this again – if you lie down next to them until they are asleep they may want you to stay with them again in the night when they wake up.
- **You may stay in their room for a while when they are about to fall asleep** – try to reduce the time you need to stay with them in their bedroom and aim to get them to fall asleep when they are on their own – that may take a while when they are very young – you may come in and out of the room in the beginning.



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Common Sleep Challenges

- **Night waking:** Normal in babies but usually improves after 6 months. Reassure without over-stimulating or picking child up from bed unless your baby is unwell or sick.
- **Resistance to bedtime:** Be consistent and calm. Avoid power struggles. There is a period which is called “*The Forbidden Zone*” when your child is not ready to go to bed (for example if it is too early in the evening, too close to the afternoon nap or due to sleeping in in the morning)
- **Co-sleeping:** It’s a personal choice but be aware that it can reduce sleep quality and may carry risks in young infants. In breast feeding children co-sleeping will lead to repeated night time feeding in children over 6 months.

When to Seek Advice

Speak to your health visitor or GP if:

- Your child consistently sleeps poorly despite a routine.
- There are signs of sleep apnoea (snoring, pauses in breathing).
- Sleep problems affect your child’s behaviour, growth, or wellbeing.

Remember

Consistency, patience, and gentle reassurance are key. A good sleep routine helps your child feel secure and rested – and gives you some well-earned rest too!

Written by: Dr W Muller

Date: 01/04/2025 – updated 18/08/2025