

HOW MUCH SLEEP SHOULD MY CHILD GET?

Sleeping is something we all do, and some of us do it very well! (I guess I speak for myself.) Every living thing needs sleep to rejuvenate mentally, physically and emotionally. As babies, sleeping is the primary activity of the brain during early development. Our sleep-wake cycle is regulated by daily light and darkness. At about three to six months of age, the infant develops a regular sleep-wake cycle. It is surprising to note that a child by the age of two will have spent 40 percent of their existence asleep.

Children need uninterrupted sleep because it can affect their mental and physical development. There are two types of sleep, non-rapid eye movement, (NREM) and rapid eye movement, (REM). NREM is a quiet sleep when the body repairs itself and energy is stored up. REM is more active sleep when our brains are active and we are dreaming. I will attempt to address the requirements of sleep for each childhood stage.

Newborns need 10.5 to 18 hours of sleep a day. They usually wake to feed, get changed and nurtured. The period of sleep can be anywhere from a few minutes to a couple of hours. Each infant will develop their own schedule. If you want them to sleep more at night, expose them to more light and noise during the day. Also make their environment quieter at night so they can rest.

Infants ranging from 3-11 months sleep about 9-12 hours. They take naps around one to four times a day. As they get older, their naps decrease in number. Try to put your infant down as they get drowsy. This will help

them develop the habit of falling asleep on their own. So if they should wake during the night, there is a chance that they can put themselves back to sleep. Try to develop bedtime rituals and make the environment quiet and relaxing.

Toddlers need about 12-14 hours of sleep. Around 18 months of age the toddler will probably decrease their nap to about once a day, lasting from one to three hours. At this age nighttime fears and nightmares are common and a child should be reassured and comforted. Again, a child on a schedule will feel more in control.

Preschoolers need about 11-13 hours of sleep a night. Most children do not nap after 5 years old. Develop a schedule and again have a relaxing bedtime ritual. Keep the environment quiet. Avoid having the TV in the bedroom. This sometimes stimulates the child's imagination and hinders sleep.

School aged children need about 10-11 hours of sleep to do well mentally in school. This age gets involved in computers, TV, extracurricular activities and numerous social activities. Without proper sleep, the child could experience mood swings, behavioral problems or disruption with cognitive functions that could impede school learning ability. The school age child needs to be taught good sleep patterns. Emphasize regular sleep patterns without computers or TV activity right before bedtime.

The body needs to wind down from all activities. Make sure your child has a comfortable bed, has a room that is quiet and dark with no distractions. Also try not to give your child a heavy meal or caffeine before bed: they

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will sleep much easier. The school age child needs proper rest to excel in the learning process.

Structure of a bedtime schedule is needed to give a child a sense of control. They will know what to expect of their day. It will have an ever lasting effect on your child and their performance as they grow and develop.

As always, if you have any questions or comments, eMail me at gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov