

Strategies for helping your child go to bed

1 Make Sure Your Child is Tired

- During the day, provide frequent opportunities for fresh air, movement and stimulation.
- Engage them in different play experiences. Discover new things to see, hear, feel, do and explore.
- Some medications may make your child more alert and make it harder to fall asleep.

2 Make Sure Your Child is Not Hungry or Thirsty or Uncomfortable

- Offer a small, nutritious snack such as milk, crackers, cereal or fruit, about half an hour before bedtime. Avoid sugary foods and caffeine. For example, chocolate, pop or hot chocolate.
- Be aware of physical conditions. Is your child teething? Sick? Wet? Hungry? In pain?
- Make sure your child visits the bathroom before bed or has a dry diaper.

3 Maintain a Consistent Day Time Routine

- Sometimes visual cues may help your child follow the routine.
- Talk to your child about what is going to happen during the day.
- Your child's day should follow a regular expected pattern. Naptime and mealtimes should occur about the same time every day. Make sure that naps are not scheduled too late in the day or too close to bedtime.

4 Maintain a Consistent Night Time Routine

- Follow a consistent, predictable routine.
- Begin about the same time every night.
- Begin the nighttime routine at an appropriate time, not when your child is in the middle of a favourite activity.
- Do the same 3 to 4 things in the same order. For example have a bath, brush teeth, read a story, play soft music, kiss goodnight.
- Set limits and stick to them. Let your child know that the story is coming to an end and that it is almost time for lights out. For example a round of kisses, same number of stories.
- If your child has an item that comforts them, make it part of the nighttime routine. For example, blanket or a stuffed toy.
- Make bedtime a close, quiet, personal and special time.



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5 Set the Surroundings for Sleep

- Make sure the surroundings fit your child's preferences.
- Lighting, noise level, comfortable pajamas and bedding should all be considered. For example, warm the bed if your child likes this.
- Help your child feel safe and secure by encouraging the use of a special blanket, stuffed toy, or an object such as an item of clothing from a parent.
- Avoid scary, over-stimulating stories, videos and video games.
- Avoid rough-play right before bedtime.

6 Monitor Your Child's Sleep-Wake Cycle

There is a wide range of what is considered enough sleep for a toddler.

- What is the total number of sleep hours for your child? Combined nap and night hours of sleep can range from 10 – 13 hours per day, but your child may need more or less than this.
- Your child may be napping too much, too long or too close to bedtime.
- To determine how much sleep your individual child needs, monitor any changes in your child's mood and functioning throughout the day. For example, drowsiness, not wanting to nap or irritability.

7 Consider Your Child's Stage of Development

- Is he having trouble being away from the caregiver during the day? For example, separation difficulties.
- Does he still need a daytime nap?

Remember

- Bed time problems in young children are very common.
- Many young children have trouble going to bed, staying in bed or staying in bed.
- You are not alone.

Further Reading

<http://www.capitalhealth.ca/nr/default.asp>

<http://www.investinkids.ca>