



## Time for bed

Just like adults, children need their sleep. When they do not sleep well, they can feel unhappy or frustrated. They may cry a lot and nothing seems to satisfy them for long. Getting enough sleep can also be a concern for parents. Over time, babies gradually sleep longer during the night.

### How can I make sure that my child is safe when they are sleeping?

Creating a safe sleeping environment for your baby will reduce the risk of injuries and sleep related infant death, including Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Babies are safest when placed to sleep:

- On their backs
- In their own sleep space
- In a safe crib, cradle, bassinet or other option
- On a firm surface that is free from hazards like blankets, pillows and toys
- In a home that is smoke free
- At the right temperature (babies should be cozy and warm, but not too hot)

Breastfeeding has also been shown to reduce the risk of SIDs.

**Room sharing** is when your child is within reach of you but on a separate sleeping surface. Room sharing is recommended for the first 6 months and can protect against Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). For more information on SIDS, see [HealthLinkBC File #46 Sleep related infant death](#).

**Bedsharing** is where a child sleeps on the same sleeping surface or bed with another person. Bedsharing can be especially risky in some situations. It's important to talk with your family and your health care provider about how to

make every sleep as safe as possible for your baby. See [HealthLinkBC File #107 Safe sleeping for babies](#) and Safer Sleep For My Baby - [www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2017/safer-sleep-for-my-baby.pdf](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2017/safer-sleep-for-my-baby.pdf) (PDF 2132 KB) for more information.

### How can I get my baby to sleep?

For the first few months, your baby may sleep for about 18 out of every 24 hours. Newborn babies usually sleep for 3 or 4 hours at a time. In the early months, most babies wake up several times at night for feeding.

Breastfeeding or chestfeeding can be a great way to get your new baby back to sleep. If you do feed your baby in the night, keep the room dark and quiet. Don't stimulate your baby by trying to play with them before putting them back in their bed.

Making sure that your baby gets enough nap time during the day can also help them sleep well at night.

At about 6 months, your baby's sleep patterns will change. Your baby will start each night with a few hours of very deep sleep, followed by several hours of lighter sleep. During light sleep, they may partly wake many times. At this age, your baby has developed enough to begin to learn how to fall asleep on their own. This is an important skill that will help both of you have more restful nights. To help teach your baby how to fall asleep on their own:

- Breastfeed, chestfeed or bottle feed at the **start** of the bedtime routine
- Rock or sing to your baby before you put them into bed
- Make sure the room is quiet and dark

- Stroke or hold your baby's hand while they lie in the crib. Do this less and less as your baby learns to fall asleep on their own, without you in the room
- Be consistent. Follow the same routine for naps and at night

### How can I get my toddler to sleep?

Many children between 1 and 3 years of age wake up during the night at least once a week. Waking at night peaks between 18 months to 2 years and then decreases over time.

Ages 1 to 3 years are also a time when children discover and start expressing their independence. They want to make their own decisions, so naps and bedtimes may be a challenge. We know that babies and children usually respond well to structured nap and bedtime routines while being allowed to make some of their own decisions. Think about designing a routine that suits you and your child. This routine can help slow your child down enough to sleep.

### How can I help my toddler develop a good bedtime routine and sleep habits?

Children do well with a familiar schedule. By having a predictable day and a regular bedtime routine, you will help your child to sleep well. Here are some tips on how you can help your child:

- Set up daytime schedule that includes regular times for naps, snack and meal times, and the start of the bedtime routine
- Let your child know when the bedtime routine is about to begin – for example, “After we tidy up the toys, we will get ready for sleep time”
- Slow down activity at bedtime
- Avoid screens before bedtime, which is stimulating and not relaxing

- Give your child some choices at bedtime – for example, which story to read, which pajamas to wear or whether to have bubbles in their bath
- Make bedtime a special time and talk about the day for a few moments
- Cuddle together, make up a story about your child's day, and ask for ideas or input. For example, “Jason woke up early this morning and the first thing he did was crawl into bed with his daddy. Then he went for breakfast. What did he eat?” Small children love stories where they are the main character
- Sing a favourite song, or read a bedtime story
- Help your child learn to fall asleep on their own by putting them into bed while they are sleepy but still awake
- Keep the sleeping area quiet, and check on them regularly until they fall asleep
- Repeat the phrase “Now it is sleep time” while your child is tucked into bed

If your child will not go to sleep or wakes up in the night, repeat the last step in the bedtime routine. For example, sing a song while you give your child a hug or cuddle, and then repeat the phrase “Now it is sleep time.”

Most families find that a happy bedtime routine combines what the child and the parents need. An established bedtime routine also makes it easier for other people to put your child to bed.

### For more information

For more information about child development, see the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC File #92a Your child and play from birth to 3 years](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92b Your child's development from birth to 3 years](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92c Your child's feelings](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92d Toilet learning](#)