

How much sleep should my child get?

by Erica Berg, MD

Sleep is a powerful regulator of mood, behavior and performance. "There's nothing like a good night's sleep!"



During the newborn period and infancy:

It is important to respect a baby's need for sleep. We encourage parents to satisfy their newborn's every need. When a newborn awakens at night crying and hungry, the baby should be fed promptly. But this special time of life does not go on forever. By the age of four months, babies have "settled" into a nighttime sleeping pattern and are ready to go without feedings overnight (at least six hours).



After the age of four months, for the first time, we ask parents to set limits on their baby's behavior. This is the first time parents are being asked to say "no" to their baby, and it can be very difficult.

SLEEP helps SLEEP. The better a baby naps during the day the better they will sleep at night. When babies are overtired, there is an increase in adrenaline, a hyper-alert state that can make baby's fussy and irritable and less likely to fall asleep.

Signs of sleepiness: a slight quieting, a lull in being busy, slight staring off or hint of calmness. Make sure babies are put to sleep at these times before they become overtired. And ideally put them down awake and drowsy. Try to avoid the baby falling asleep in your arms. Sleeping alone is an important part of learning to separate from parent without anxiety and see self as independent. The ability to fall asleep on our own and a regular bedtime routine is one of the most valuable gifts we can give our children. (For more information, see the article on our website, *Sleeping Like A Baby*.)

Here are the recommended hours each child should regularly sleep each day for their best health:

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Newborns: 16-17 hours/day,

7 daily sleep periods

Babies 1-4 months: 14-18 hours/day

longest nighttime sleep stretch is 4-9 hours.

Babies are born nocturnal, try to help them shift their day/night cycles.

Babies 4-12 months: 12-16 hours (including naps)

Toddlers 1-2 years: 11-14 hours (including naps)

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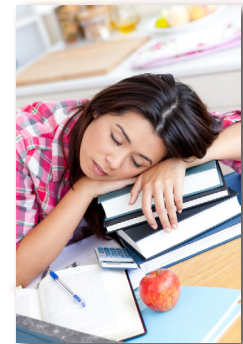
Recently the American Academy of Sleep Medicine laid out new guidelines for children's sleep needs. Here are the recommended hours each child should regularly sleep each day for their best health during the next stage of schooling years:

Ages 3-5 years: 10-13 hours (including naps)
Age 6-12 years: 9-12 hours
Age 13-18 years: 8-10 hours

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Teens should sleep eight to 10 hours per night while younger children need even more sleep, according to the new recommendations, endorsed by the AAP. As pediatricians, we know that sleeping fewer than the recommended number of hours is related to attention problems, behavioral issues and learning difficulties. Also lack of sleep will increase the risk of accidents and injuries, plus high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes and depression. It is also recommended that sleep also must be appropriately timed and without disturbances. Consistency is also key when adjusting to a sleep schedule, even on the weekends.



School Starts Too Early for Teens!

by Doug Puder, MD

Another study has confirmed what most teenagers will tell you: *school starts too early!* The teenage "bio-clock" or circadian rhythm is set later than it is for younger children and adults. Most studies estimate about a 2 hour sleep-wake phase delay compared with younger children.

Translation: It's hard for teenagers to fall asleep much before 10-11 pm. This observation has been shown across all cultures and ethnic groups. Yet school start times are usually earliest for the teenage group, often starting at 7:30am.

Though teenagers have trouble falling asleep, their sleep requirement is still 8 to 10 hours/night and "sleeping late on weekends" doesn't work for catch-up. Many teenagers have been shown to be chronically sleep deprived.

In a Rhode Island school, delaying school start time until 8:30am had a dramatic positive impact on students' lives. The proportion of students who got less than 7 hours of sleep on school nights decreased from 34% to 7%, and over half of the students slept more than 8 hours.

Tappan Zee High School made this change three years ago. It's Principal, Dr. Amos, told me, "I greet students in the front hallway in the morning. It used to be like greeting 'zombies' and now I am greeting smiling engaged students!"

The number of students who felt "too tired" to do schoolwork, socialize, or participate in school activities decreased significantly. Absentee rates decreased by nearly half! The numbers of depressed, "easily annoyed" or unhappy teens decreased by over 20%. Other similar studies have shown that tired teenagers have more car accidents, poorer grades, less exercise (with associated weight gain).

We encourage parents to open discussions with their local school boards and PTA's to discuss later school start times. We know bus and sports schedules are complex, but start times can and should be changed.

