

Solving Naptime Problems

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *The No-Cry Sleep Solution*

Napping is an important element of your child’s healthy mental and physical growth. A daily nap refreshes a child so that she can maintain her energy, focus, and ability to learn for the rest of the day. Some studies even show that children who nap every day are more flexible and adaptable, have longer attention spans and are less fussy than those who don’t nap.

How can you tell if your child needs a nap?

Here are some of the signs that your child needs a daily nap:

- Wakes up in a good mood, but gets whiny and cranky as the day progresses
- Has more patience early in the day, but is easily aggravated later on
- Cries more easily in the afternoon and evening than earlier in the day
- Has an afternoon or early evening slump, but gets a second wind afterwards
- Yawns, rubs eyes, or fusses while getting ready for bed
- Often falls asleep in the car or when watching a movie

How much naptime does your child need?

Children differ in their sleep needs, some needing more or less than shown here — but what follows is a general guide that applies to most of them. Even if your child’s sleep hours add up to the right amount, his or her behavior tells you more than any chart possibly could. When in doubt – always try for a nap, since even a period of quiet time can help a child feel more refreshed.

Average hours of daytime and nighttime sleep

Age	Number of naps	Total length of naptime hours	Nighttime sleep hours**	Total of nighttime and naptime sleep
Newborn*				
3 months	3	5 – 6	10 – 11	15
6 months	2	3 – 4	10 - 11	14 – 15
9 months	2	2 ½ - 4	11 - 12	14
12 months	1–2	2 – 3	11 ½ –12	13 ½ –14
18 months	1–2	2 – 3	11 ¼ -12	13 – 14
2 years	1	1–2 ½	11–12	13 – 13 ½
2 ½ years	1	1 ½ -2	11–11 ½	13 – 13 ½
3 years	1	1–1 ½	11 –11 ½	12 – 13
4 years	0 -1	0 -1	11–11 ½	11 – 12 ½
5-6 years	0 -1	0 -1	11	11 – 12

*Newborns sleep 16-18 hours daily, spread over 6-7 sleep periods. ** These averages don’t signify unbroken stretches of sleep.
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When should your child nap?

The timing of your child's naps is important since a nap that occurs too late in the day will prevent your child from being tired at bedtime. Generally, the best nap times are:

- If your child takes two naps: midmorning (around 9:00 to 11:00) and early afternoon (around 12:00 to 2:30)
- If your child takes one nap: early afternoon (around 12:00 to 2:30); after lunch

If your child tends towards short naps, don't give in and assume that it's all the nap time that she needs. Try some of these tips for increasing the length of naps:

- Give your child lunch or a snack a half hour before nap.
- Keep the sleeping room dark.
- Play soothing music or white noise during the entire nap.
- Make certain that discomfort from teething, allergies, asthma, ear infection or other health issues aren't preventing your child from taking a good nap. If you suspect any of these, schedule a visit to your health care professional.

Watch for signs of tiredness

Tired children fall asleep easily. If he isn't tired he'll resist sleep, but if you miss his signals, he can become *overtired* and be unable to fall asleep when you finally do put him to bed. Your child may demonstrate one or more of these signs that tell you he is tired and ready to nap - *now*:

- losing interest in playtime
- rubbing his eyes
- looking glazed or unfocused
- becoming whiny, cranky or fussy
- losing patience with toys, activities or playmates
- having tantrums
- yawning
- lying down or slumping in his seat
- caressing a lovey or blanket
- asking for a pacifier, bottle or to nurse

The nap routine

Once you have created a nap schedule that works with your child's daily periods of tiredness, follow a simple but specific nap routine. Your child will be most comfortable if there is a pattern to his day. He may come to predict when his naptime approaches and willingly cooperate with you.

Nap routines change

Children's sleep needs change over time, so remember that the routine that you set up today won't be the same one you're using a year from now. Be adaptable!

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