



Naps

Naps: Children's Schedules & Transitions

Age	Naps per day	Description
Birth to 3 months	3 to 6	Naps are quite irregular and disorganized, varying in length from a few minutes to several hours. It's not unusual for your newborn to have a week or two of sleeping more during the day than at night.
4 - 8 months	3	Often at 4 months infants transitions from four naps a day to three. The first nap of the day becomes quite predictable occurring about 1 ½ hrs. after the regular morning rise time. The second nap begins about 2-3 hrs. after the first nap ends but often no earlier than 11 a.m. The third nap starts between 3:30-5:30 p.m. after your child has been awake at least two hrs. Around 8 months, your child gradually transitions to two naps a day.
9 - 14 months	2	The first nap remains the most predictable nap and occurs about 2 - 2 ½ hrs. after the regular morning rise time, most often 9 to 9:30 a.m. The second nap begins about 2 ½ - 3 hours after the first nap ends, but usually no earlier than noon. The naps together total about 2 - 4 hours.
15 - 17 months	1 to 2	Your child is in transition (some days taking one nap, some days taking two) for perhaps 4 to 10 weeks. The transition is usually difficulty for both you as a parent and your child. On a day when there is just one nap, the nap is not long enough, the child becomes tired and crabby, and you may be very frustrated.
1 ½ - 5 years	1	The nap begins about 5-6 hours after the regular morning rise time, typically between noon and 12:30 the first six months, then generally between noon and 1:00 pm.

**Sleep Medicine
& Research Center**

Prepared by Nancy Birkenmeier, BSN, RN,
Sleep Medicine and Research Center,
St. Luke's Hospital. This material may be copied
for educational purposes, but acknowledgement
must be made to the author and institution.

 **St. Luke's
HOSPITAL**

Our specialty is you.

Nap Transition: From Two Naps per Day to One

The transition from two naps a day in a toddler to one is frequently awkward for the child and is described by most parents as anything but smooth. Here are some of the signs indicating a child may be in transition:

- The child is 15- to 18-months old.
- The morning nap gradually drifts later or becomes shorter (30 to 45 min).
- The child is put down for the morning nap as usual, but plays for 30 to 60 minutes before falling asleep.
- The child misses a morning nap one or two days without any problems but the next morning can barely stay awake until 9:30 a.m.
- The child falls asleep between 10 and 12 noon, sleeps only 1 to 1 ½ hrs, is unable to fall asleep for a second nap, and is crabby all afternoon.
- In other words, one nap is not enough, two is too many.

Most toddlers take weeks to completely settle into one good nap per day, and by the time this occurs, most are 17-months or older. During the transition, your child may bounce back and forth, taking one nap one day and two the next. This can make it impossible to plan the day and become extremely frustrating. And to make matters worse, your child is tired and crabby.

How can a parent make this transition smoother?

- Don't try to force a schedule of one nap a day by keeping your child up all morning – this often makes the situation worse. In fact, encourage two naps a day for as long as it seems comfortable for the child. The older the child is during nap transition, the shorter and less troublesome the transition period.
- If one day your child takes one short nap (60 to 90 minutes), the next day probably two naps will occur. Conversely, if a child takes two long naps one day, the next day only one nap may be needed.
- When a nap starts around 10:30 to 11:00 and is only 60 to 90 minutes, you know your toddler will become tired and crabby late in the afternoon. If you put the child down for a nap at 3 or 4 p.m., she may cry and not be able to fall asleep. Instead, it may be less painful to plan a car or stroller ride around 3 to 5 p.m. in the hopes that the child may fall asleep for a brief nap; this may be enough to make the toddler less irritable and prevent you from having to put her to bed that night unusually early.
- Some days, a 20 to 30 minute car or stroller nap between 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. will be just enough to keep your toddler in a good mood, at the same time enabling him to stay up until 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. for a "real nap."
- Try a bedtime of 7:00 p.m. occasionally when your child takes only one nap during the day and it's obvious he needs to catch up on sleep.

Nap Transition: Eliminating Daytime Naps

How does a parent transition from one nap to no naps?

Soon after their third birthday, many children begin the process of gradually eliminating daytime naps - the gradual nature of this process surprises many parents. First a nap is skipped perhaps once every 10 to 14 days and the child functions very well. Sometimes the child functions so well that a parent assumes the nap is no longer needed. The parent soon discovers that when the child does not nap on consecutive days, the child is no longer functioning well; a sleep debt accumulates and results in a tired and crabby child.

By age 3 ½, some children skip a nap once every four to seven days and function well. Others continue to take a daily nap. The 3 year old that goes to bed at 7 p.m. and rises between 7:00 and 7:30 a.m. (obtaining 12 to 12 ½ hours of sleep per night) doesn't need the nap and functions well. Problems occur, however, when the 3-year-old becomes so resistant to taking a nap that the parent stops trying, naps are skipped on consecutive days, and not enough sleep is obtained at night to compensate. This typically results in "crashing" episodes – after 7 to 10 days with no nap, the child's sleep debt is so high, he falls asleep accidentally in the late afternoon, sleeps very deeply for 60 to 90 minutes, and consequently is unable to fall asleep that night until long after his usual bedtime. The solution: The parent must be committed to making sure the child obtains enough sleep at night, or that the child takes a nap several times a week. Some 4-year olds take naps several times a week or more while some obtain all their sleep at night. Most 5-year olds can easily obtain all the sleep they need at night, but a few prefer to continue to take naps.

Napping Habits of the 3- to 5-Year old

How can a parent tell if a 3- to 5-year-old needs a nap?

Parents of the 3- to 5-year-old may feel confused and ambivalent about whether a child needs a nap, especially if the child displays significant nap resistance. This decision should be based on the child's behavior, as well as the amount of sleep the child regularly obtains at night.

Required hours of sleep per day:

- Most 3-year olds require 12 ½ hours
- Most 4-year olds require 11 ½ to 12 hours
- Most 5-year olds require 11 hours

The well-rested child appears alert but calm, is able to concentrate and is less likely to have tantrums. He or she usually falls asleep easily at bedtime and rarely falls asleep in the car or while watching television. Sleep loss, even of brief duration, may be harmful for learning.