Start when your child is young. Healthy sleep is a habit, just like healthy eating habits, which are learned. The sooner you put into practice these rules, the earlier you can teach your child healthy sleeping habits and prevent many common sleeping problems.

Pay attention to signs that your child is growing tired. Putting your child to bed when she first shows signs of becoming tired may help her go to sleep with less fuss or crying. Keep daytime naps and bedtime steady. As your child grows, you may find that bedtime adjustments are needed. When you need to make these changes, try to adhere to a consistent schedule every day.

Adhere to an early bedtime. Your child may have an easier time falling asleep if she goes to sleep earlier, before she has a chance to become overtired, and she may sleep later in the morning. Often, moving up a bedtime by just 20 or 30 minutes can make a difference.

Don't neglect naps. Naps are as critical to healthy cognitive, emotional and physical development as night sleep. Naps lead to optimal daytime alertness and can help your child sleep easier at night. As much as possible, try and stick to a consistent nap schedule every day. When your child is young, make naps a part of her regular routine. As your child grows older, try and maintain naps. Be sure that your child is getting enough sleep. The sooner you establish a consistent sleep schedule, the better your child will sleep.

Start early. Begin your bedtime routine about thirty minutes before bedtime. This will help you and your baby to relax and enjoy the winding down process.

Be consistent. Using a consistent soothing style will help your child settle down and get ready to go to sleep. You might try bathing, listening to music, reading a book, feeding, rocking, singing or massaging. Pick a style of soothing that makes you feel comfortable and stick to it. By creating consistent bedtime routines, you teach him how to soothe himself to sleep.

Say good night. After you complete your bedtime routine, say good night, close the door and walk away—even if your child cries in protest. How long you allow the protest crying to continue depends upon your own comfort level.

How do I help my child develop good sleep habits? Be sensitive to your child’s sleep needs and establish good sleep habits from the beginning. Deciding how long you should let your child cry requires sensitivity to your child’s needs, persistence and flexibility.

Exactly what you do in the routine is up to you—choose whatever activities make you and your child comfortable—but do it consistently.

Good bedtime practices

- Make a bath time routine
  A warm water bath can be a calming experience, and is a good way to relax a young child. Also during this time, you can have him prepare for bed by brushing his teeth and putting on his pajamas.
- Say goodnight
  Once your child is ready for bed, have her go around the house saying goodnight to anyone who will be around the house.
- Make a chat
  As you tuck your child into bed, you can talk to her about her day, your day, and things for her to look forward to in the morning.
- Read bedtime stories
  Reading to your child is a great pastime. Allow your child to choose a book and then read it aloud to him.
- Sing a lullaby
  Singing the same song to your child each night can be a wonderful way to soothe him to sleep. After this you can play a tape of familiar bedtime songs.
- Distinguish between day and night
  Newborns don’t pay attention to the time of day; they just sleep and eat around the clock. But you can start teaching the difference between morning and evening, naptime and bedtime, when your baby is just a few weeks old.

During the day, play with her, talk to her, and wake her for feedings. Keep daytime naps at the normal level and keep the house, including her room, sunny and bright.

At night, turn down the lights, noises and conversation when you feed and change her. Try to understand that day is for play and night is to sleep light.

ACTION ITEMS

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