

## Getting Children to Sleep



Getting children to sleep is a challenge that many of us have, and is probably one of the biggest factors that interferes with alone time with our partner, as well as time spent taking care of our personal needs. Effects on our own health, such as being sleep deprived, and all that it entails, and not eating right, are hidden disadvantages when our children have sleep issues.

The following is a guide to help get children, from newborns to 3+ years old, to sleep on time and with less hassle. [Click here for Disclaimer.](#)

The tips are listed in ascending order.

**Any of the tips used for the children in the younger age ranges below can be used for older kids too;** within reason. For example, you would not want to try to swaddle a three year old. However, you can certainly provide bedtime stories, listed in the 12-36 months old section, for your three or four year old. **However, the tips listed for older children should not be done for the younger children.** For instance, **don't give milk with honey to anyone under 12 months old, and you definitely don't want to give coins to a younger child (or any child who will put them in his/her mouth).**

**To cut to the chase, just click on the age range(s) and/subject matter that apply to your child or children.** Or read the article in it's entirety, if you have that kind of time 😊

- [Not letting a child oversleep](#)
- [All ages: \(Newborn-36+ months\)](#)
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You probably wish you could do more with your day...read, exercise, tidy up, etc. For some of us, big obstacles to not getting around to these activities are...the kids.

It is a chain reaction. You did not clean the family room because for one to two hours after your little one's scheduled bedtime, you've likely dealt with the likes of:

"I'm still hungry/thirsty".

"I'm scared"

"What's that noise?"

"I have to go to the bathroom"

"I need my blue (or red, or green) Power Ranger in here with me. Can you find it?"

These are the same reasons you did not get up forty-five minutes earlier the following morning to go for that brisk morning walk before work...you were too tired from dealing with a bedtime challenged child.

Why aren't they sleepy when children are supposed to be sleepy?

Why do they fall asleep early, then wake up at 2am, and keep you up until it is time to go to work?

Are they sleeping too much during their nap time?

Are they over stimulated at bed time?

Do they simply not need that much sleep?

For those of you whose kids are in the bed, at 7, 8, or 9 o'clock pm mostly every night, my hats to you. You probably don't need this article. But it does provide some good tips for most of us.

For the rest of us, try one of the following approaches:

### **Not letting a child oversleep**

For all children, you want to make sure they are ready for bedtime by getting the appropriate amount of sleep during their nap time. **The appropriate amount of sleep during nap time means not too little and not too much either.** There are exceptions. Newborns should nap as long as they want to, unless they are well overdue for a feeding. Children who have come down with colds, viruses, and other illnesses should have extended nap times also. Other than these exceptions, it is not a good idea to let a child sleep longer than usual. Just like how an over tired child can be quite cranky, a child with too much sleep can be just as problematic when his night bed time comes. Wake your sleeping angel who is "over napping":

- **Gently say his name, while tickling his lips** (with clean fingers and finger nails of course).
- When your child opens her eyes, **continue the eye contact for a minute or two, while smiling and talking to her.** Direct eye contact is very stimulating to a child. This may not be necessary for a mobile toddler.
- **Remove your child's clothes and change his diaper.**
- **Use a cool, damp cloth to gently wipe the child's face and body.**

If your child is in daycare or goes to a baby-sitter, try asking them to limit the amount of sleep your child gets, if you think it will help. There are no guarantees that the child-care provider will do it, but it is worth the asking.



**All Ages: (Newborn-36+ months)**

About two hours before a child's bedtime, start setting the stage. It would be a good time to:

**Turn out or dim most of the lights in the home (or at least in the areas the child will be). Clothes the blinds and shut the curtains.**

If you still have to have dinner during this time frame, **why not try a candlelight dinner.** This sets a romantic mood for adults. Why not a sleepy time mood for children? **I recommend flameless candles** for this.

**If you have a television, now is a good time to turn that off too.**

Some children are actually soothed by TV. Yes, we know about all of the negative info out there about young children and TV watching...not a good thing; could lead to ADD (a claim with lots of controversy); don't use the TV as a babysitter; bad parenting, etc. etc. etc. However, depending on one's situation, and everyone's is different, a little TV may not be a horribly bad thing. Having soothing type programs, at a low volume, can help relax some children. If you have digital cable, Sprout (channel 243) has "The Good Night Show" every day, starting at 6pm . It's designed to help pre-schoolers unwind. Mister Roger's Neighborhood tends to be soothing too. Unfortunately, this is not on during night time hours anymore, but that may change. If you have a DVR or Tivo, a couple of his shows may be worth recording if you have a preschooler who fights going to sleep.

Some wonderful **videos** to have on hand:

- **"Goodnight Moon and Other Sleepytime Tales"**
- **"The Very Hungry Caterpillar and Other Stories"**

Keep in mind...a little bit of slow paced, calming television viewing, for short periods of time, may not be a bad thing, especially if they are viewed about an hour or so, before bedtime.

**Light Music....**

...drifting softly through the home, or in the child's room. If you have **lullaby cd's** from a baby shower or recent birthday, use them. Otherwise, finding some **light jazz or soft music** on the radio (**107.7 FM**), or your television service provider, may do the trick:

- [Cox Channels](#) 934, 935, 939, 941
- [DIRECTV Channels](#) 820, 852, 884
- [Verizon FIOS Channels](#) 1834, 1835, 1840

\*Note-Channel line ups can suddenly change, so check your service provider's guide for the most updated information.

## Give them their bath

Try adding some soothing scents in the bathroom like **lavender, sandalwood, jasmine, and chamomile**. **I don't recommend adding these oils, leaves, etc to the child's bathwater**. However, putting them in the sink, while bathing your child, should work just the same. Or simply use a **soothing bath wash, designed especially for babies**. **A scented candle**, on the counter, can be useful during bath time. **I recommend the flameless candles for this too**.



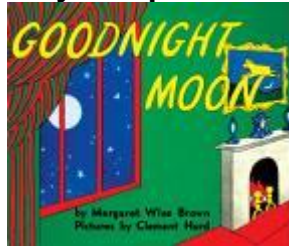
## 0-12 months

Use the [5 S's as described by Dr. Karp](#), "**The Happiest Baby on the Block**":

- **Swaddling**. Wrap the baby in the famed "baby burrito". For a diagram [click here](#). For a video, [click here](#).
- **Side/Stomach positioning**. Holding your baby on her left side, or placing her on her stomach will aid her in digesting food.
- **Shushing**. Making the shhhh sound mimics the swooshing sounds your baby heard in the womb. It is soothing. You can verbally make this noise yourself, or use the white noise of a fan, hair dryer, vacuum cleaner, or better yet, a white noise CD.
- **Swinging** motions, whether in a baby swing, car ride, or rocking, tends to relax babies because it mimics what they were used to in the womb.
- **Sucking**. When a baby sucks on a pacifier, bottle, breast, or your fingers (clean of course), this causes a calming reflex

## 12-36 months

- Try a mixture of **1 cup of warm milk** with **one half tablespoon of honey** (**important: not for children under 12 months. I personally wait until 24 months**).
- **Read them a story/tell them a story.** This is an obvious one. Some sleepy time ditties include: **Time for Bed, Goodnight Goodnight Sleepy Head, Sleep Baby Sleep: Lullabies and Night Poems, Sleepy Bears,**



and of course **Goodnight Moon.** Being creative and **making up a sleepy time story, that mirrors your child,** can be just as affective: "On night Katie-Ann came home from daycare and had a bowl of spaghetti and some broccoli for dinner. After dinner, she played with the kitty cat for a while, as her mom ran her a nice warm bath, with bubbles! Katie-Ann took her bath and played with her toy boat. She dried off with a nice fluffy towel and her Mom put on her warm pink princess pajamas..."

- **Provide last minute bathroom breaks, snacks, or a drink of water.** Kids typically ask for these before bed. Of course, it can be a stalling tactic. However, sometimes these are needs that the child really has. Either way, it is best to accommodate these needs...preferably proactively. By being proactive, you can diminish the stalling tactic effect your child may tend to use. Have the child use the restroom before settling him down for the night, give him some water, and offer him a snack of one of the following: **whole wheat bread with hummus, slice of luncheon turkey and celery slices, cheese and crackers.** These food combinations are believed to have a calming effect.

## Over 36 months

- **Educate your child about the importance of sleep.** Let him know that sleep is what helps him to grow up to be fast, strong, and smart.
- **Chamomile tea with a little bit of honey.** Lots of honey will cause one's energy to increase. But a little bit has a calming affect.
- **Positive reinforcement.** Don't underestimate the power of positive reinforcement. Praise your child for sleeping in her bed all night. Let her know how proud you are and how alert she looks. It may not hurt to give small reward too, so she looks forward to sleeping in her bed all night.
- Rewarding a child with **coins** can have a tremendous impact. It also helps them learn how to manage money. **At the ages of 3 and 4,** many children

don't recognize the value of the different coins. If your child does not currently have a piggy bank, now is a good time to get one. Kids love the sound of money jiggling around in them. **Important: When providing coins to children, do so responsibly. Don't allow them to play with loose change. Give them coins to put in their piggy bank; then keep the piggy bank out of reach. Only allow a young child access to their piggy bank and coins under your direct and constant supervision.** When you are no longer able to directly supervise, put the bank and coins away for another time. **Single dollar bills work well too!** So your child does not lose them, it is a good idea to keep them for your child as well. For instance, you can tell her that she earned another dollar, put the dollar in an envelope with her name on it, and write the amount of dollars currently in the envelope. Keep the envelope in a safe place.

Once your child is successfully earning coins and/or dollars, let her know that at the end of the week, she can use her savings to get a treat or a prize!

- A **breakfast treat** also tends to work. All kids like surprises. Have a morning breakfast treat, waiting for your child after he slept in his bed all night. This breakfast surprise can be a **muffin with a birthday candle in it**, a **smiley face pancake** (with various fruits and whipped cream to make eyes, nose), from time to time, a **Rice Krispy Treat** (as long as it is supplemented with other more nutritious foods and is only done occasionally) or a granola bar that sort of mimics a Rice Krispy Treat. Keep in mind, **presentation is the key**. Don't just hand the kid his treat. Have it waiting for him, on his favorite plate, flanked with his favorite spoon and/or fork, on the kitchen table, free of clutter. Of course if your child has any special dietetic limitations (i.e. diabetic, hypoglycemic, Celiac Disease, etc.) work within those limitations.
- **Purchase some inexpensive toys and books.** You can really load up on bargain bin type toys (just make sure they are safe and age appropriate) and books. You can give a small reward, each morning, if she makes progress with the sleeping arrangement. At the end of the week, the prize can be slightly bigger.  
Do you get the Sunday paper? The **comics make wonderful wrapping paper** for kid. Why not wrap up that end of the week prize.



### The Food Factor

Although many people already know that sugar and caffeine often affects sleep, they may not realize the amount of sugar and caffeine contained in many

unsuspecting foods. Juices, of course, contain sugar. But so do so many other items such as “light” soft drinks, crackers, and other snacks. Also, many packaged drinks contain a high amount of caffeine. It is a good idea to check the nutritional information on items you tend to give your child later in the day. Check for the grams of sugar the items contain, or the amount of caffeine. You may be surprised and therefore change what your child consumes as an evening snack.

Some people may not realize that sugar and caffeine tend to have a longer effect on some individuals, than they do on others. For example, an after dinner cookie may not effect some children by bedtime, but it may effect others. It is a good idea to monitor what you give your child, and when you give it to him, to see if there is any connection. If you are from a family that usually has a dessert associated with dinner, and you notice it is often difficult for your child to sleep through the night, you may want to change things up. Consider giving your child his “dessert” prior to dinner, but at a time it will not spoil his dinner. For the after dinner “treat” try something with less sugar and/or caffeine. This may make all of the difference in the world.

### **No one size fits all solution**

You've probably heard it all:

"You need to "Ferberize him".

"Let her cry it out for a couple of days, and she will be fine."

"You need to put them on a strict schedule and stick with it".

Some of the above solutions have been successful for many people. However, many people have tried them and have not had any success. Visit any parenting message board, of parents of young children, and you will see that many people are challenged with getting their children to sleep at night. Many people also get differences of opinion from different doctors within the same pediatric office.

The great thing about the Information Age is that there is so much info out there. One does not have to just settle on one or two suggestions.

Believe me, not all children will be fine if you let them "cry it out". Sure, some get tired and will eventually go to sleep. But some will cry literally all night and be extremely distressed the following day.

As wonderful as it is to get children on a schedule, that is not feasible for all families. In many cases working parents have shift changes. Since parents have to be flexible to maintain employment, their home schedules have to be flexible too.

We are all about thinking "outside the box" at Mommy Matinee, and don't necessarily believe in a right way or wrong way to parent. We do believe in families finding the best solutions for themselves.

### **Sources:**

For more in-depth information about different techniques and solutions, please visit: [http://www.babycenter.com/0\\_baby-sleep-resources\\_1509204.bc](http://www.babycenter.com/0_baby-sleep-resources_1509204.bc)

<http://www.healthynewage.com/good-sleep.html>

### **Disclaimer**

The tips and suggestions contained in this "Getting children to Sleep" article has been compiled from various sources, including other websites, magazines, books, and from the creator's of Mommy Matinee's own personal experiences and observations.

Mommy Matinee does not claim or imply to dispense medical advice.

We suggested one consult their family physician or pediatrician regarding the issues and suggestions indicated on this site.