

# ZZZs, Please! Bedtime for Preschoolers



*Getting enough sleep is important for your child's mental and physical development. A sleepy child is more irritable, more accident prone, and less able to pay attention than a well-rested child. Children vary, but most preschoolers need to sleep about 10 to 12 hours during each 24-hour period. Although there isn't one sure way to raise a good sleeper, the key is to try from early on to establish healthy bedtime habits.*

## How can I help my child develop good sleeping habits?

- Set fixed times for going to bed, waking up, and taking naps.
- Set aside some quiet time during the day for a nap. Explain that you want your child to start out in bed, but that it's OK to play in the bedroom quietly if he can't sleep.
- Stick to a regular bedtime, alerting your child both 30 minutes and 10 minutes beforehand.
- Include a winding-down period a half hour or so before bedtime. Offer a small, healthy snack. (Remember tooth brushing afterward!) Avoid stimulating games or television. Develop a relaxing bedtime routine that ends in the room where he sleeps.
- Let your child choose which pajamas to wear, which soft toy to take to bed, etc.
- Put him to sleep in the same quiet, cozy, sleep environment every night.
- Use the bed for sleeping only. Keep televisions and computers out of the bedroom.
- Play soft, soothing music if it helps your child relax.
- Tuck your child into bed for a feeling of affection and security.
- Kiss him goodnight and leave the room.

## What if my child has difficulty falling asleep or gets up during the night?

- Keep things quiet at bedtime to ease the transition. If your child can hear talking, laughing, or sounds from a computer or TV, it's easy to see how she might feel left out.
- Let her have a night-light or leave a door slightly open if she dislikes the dark.
- Encourage your child to fall asleep alone. Lying down with a child until she falls asleep can be a hard habit to change. If your child gets up, reassure her that she is safe and return her to her bed.

## What can I do if my child isn't tired at bedtime?

- Increase active, outdoor play (though not within 3 hours of bedtime).
- Scale back daytime naps.
- Wake her earlier in the morning.

Bedtime battles can test a parent's resolve. If your child is pushing the limits, state your expectations clearly but calmly and stick to the routine. Eventually, your consistency should pay off in a good night's sleep for everyone. If it doesn't and you're worried about your child's sleeping patterns, talk with your doctor.

## For related Web resources, see "ZZZs, Please! Bedtime for Preschoolers" at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.

*The opinions, resources, and referrals provided in this Tip Sheet are intended for information purposes only and should not be considered or used as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. We advise parents to seek the advice of a physician or other qualified health care provider with questions regarding their child's health or medical conditions.*

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29 Children's Research Center  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469  
Telephone: 217-333-1386 • Fax: 217-244-7732  
Toll-free: 877-275-3227  
Email: [iel@illinois.edu](mailto:iel@illinois.edu)  
Internet: <http://illinoisearlylearning.org>

Illinois State  
Board of Education