



How Much Sleep Do Kids Really Need?

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Sleep is the power source that keeps your mind alert and calm. Sleeping well increases brainpower just as weight lifting builds stronger muscles, because sleeping well increases your attention span and allows you to be physically relaxed and mentally alert at the same time. Then you are at your personal best.”

Marc Weissbluth, MD

The fascinating thing about sleep is how it affects every aspect of our lives. This is true for kids, too. While a 12-year-old can function on 8 – 9 hours of sleep per night, a 2-year-old would need at least 4 more hours to be considered well rested. Sleep is a vital part of living a healthy life. Getting the right amount and right quality of sleep is something that can be difficult to achieve, especially when kids have their own ideas about bedtimes and naps. Although there is no exact number of hours required for each child, there are some basic guidelines to follow.

1-4 Weeks Old: 15-16 hours per day (typically in short periods of 2-4 hours)

1-4 Months Old: 14-15 hours per day (more regular sleeping patterns start to emerge)

4-12 Months Old: 14-15 hours per day (sleep patterns become more adult-like)

1-3 Years Old: 12-14 hours per day (naps are likely to be down to one per day)

3-5 Years Old: 11-13 hours per day (naps become shorter and bedtime is around 7-9 P.M.)

6-12 Years Old: 10-11 hours per day (bedtimes become later)

12-18 Years Old: 8-9 hours per day (sleep needs still remain vital for teenagers)

Following these guidelines can be tough, and understandably so. Parents get busy and kids get fussy. Naps get forgotten or skipped when things come up. Older kids may be arguing more that their “lights out time” is unfair. It is important to keep sleep as a priority. While children are growing and their minds are maturing, sleep is a key ingredient in the process of development. The consequences of not getting consistent, quality sleep are cumulative, meaning that the occasional late night and missed nap actually add up. Sleep duration has been linked to problems with attention span, alertness, mood, and school performance. Here are some findings on sleep in children from Dr. Weissbluth’s Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child:

Children do not “outgrow” sleep problems; problems must be solved.

Children who sleep longer during the day have longer attention spans.

Toddlers who sleep more are more fun to be around, more sociable, and less demanding. Children who sleep less can behave somewhat like hyperactive children.

For ADHD children, improvements in sleep dramatically improved peer relations and classroom performance.

Healthy sleep positively affects neurologic development and appears to be the right medicine for the

prevention of many learning and behavioral problems.

As school starts back this fall and schedules become busier, remember to prioritize kids' bedtimes and sleep, even if it means cutting back on activities. This will allow your kids to enjoy and make the most of the activities and learning they are involved with.

For more information on sleep check out these resources:

Web MD – [Good Sleep for Children](#)

Sleep Foundation – [How Much Sleep Do We Need?](#)

Web MD – [Parenting Guide to Sleep](#)