



How to Train Your Child to Take Naps and Sleep Through the Night

All children need sleep, but some fight it more than others. If your child screams at bedtime, wakes repeatedly at night and refuses to nap during the day, you need to teach her how to soothe herself to sleep.

“If you’re in the habit of rocking, nursing or otherwise soothing your child to sleep—and you don’t mind doing so—there’s no reason to change,” says Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network pediatrician Rima Strassman, M.D. On the other hand, if your child can *only* fall asleep with your help and repeated night wakings are causing you to nod off during the day, both of you may benefit from what experts call “sleep training.” Many methods exist, but Strassman recommends the following four-part process.

- 1. Get a checkup.** Make sure your child doesn’t have an ear infection, toothache or some other pain that is causing nighttime or naptime wakings.
- 2. Create a bedtime and naptime routine.** This may include soft music, reading a book, some rocking and cuddle time and then placing your child in the crib or bed. Follow the same routine every day.
- 3. Once you’ve tucked your child in, leave the room.** If he’s used to being rocked or otherwise soothed to sleep, he’ll probably cry and may even scream.
- 4. After 5-10 minutes, check on and reassure your child.** If she takes a pacifier, put it in her mouth. Stroke her back and say a few reassuring words such as “good night” or “sleep time.” Then leave the room and *stay out* until she falls asleep, a process that may take anywhere from 10 minutes to more than two hours.

“It works, but it’s hard,” Strassman says. “It helps to know that despite the screams, you are not traumatizing your child. As long as he’s at least 6 months old, he knows you won’t abandon him.”

Follow this process at naps and bedtime, never deviating from it. Once children learn how to fall asleep at naptime, they sleep better at night as well.



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