

Strategies to help your child stay in bed and sleep through the night.

1 Maintain a Consistent Night Time Routine

- Follow a consistent, predictable routine.
- Begin about the same time every night.
- Begin the nighttime routine at an appropriate time, not when your child is in the middle of a favourite activity.
- Do the same 3 to 4 things in the same order. For example have a bath, brush teeth, read a story, play soft music, kiss goodnight.
- Set limits and stick to them. Let your child know that the story is coming to an end and that it is almost time for lights out. For example a round of kisses, same number of stories.
- If your child has an “attachment object”, make it part of the nighttime routine. For example, blanket or a stuffed toy.
- Make bedtime a close, quiet, personal and special time.
- Make sure your child visits the bathroom or has a dry diaper.
- Make sure your child is not thirsty or hungry.

2 Set the Surroundings for Sleep

- Make sure the surroundings fit your child’s preferences.
- Lighting, noise level, comfortable pajamas and bedding should be considered. For example, warm the bed if your child likes this.
- Help your child feel safe and secure by encouraging the use of a special blanket, stuffed toy, or an object such as an item of clothing from a parent.
- Avoid scary, over-stimulating stories, videos and video games.
- Avoid rough-play right before bedtime.



3 Nighttime Kit

- Try a nighttime kit beside the bed.
- Include stuffed animals, a favourite blanket or book, a flashlight, a water bottle.
- Favourite objects will differ from child to child.

4 After Your Child is in Bed

- Say the same thing each night when you leave your child. For example, “See you later alligator”.
- Remind your child to stay in bed and say a final goodnight.
- Tell them if they stay in bed, you will come in and check on them on a regular basis. The check can be a quick wave, pat or blowing a kiss.
- Some children like to sing and talk to themselves while they are falling asleep.
- Give your child more attention for staying in bed than getting out of bed.
- Praise your child in the morning for staying in bed or sleeping through the night.

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5 Getting Out of Bed

- Return them to bed right away. If they cry, wait a few minutes before checking on them.
- If your child continues to cry or call, wait a little while before you check them.
- Remind them that if they stay in bed, you will be back to check on them. Keep your statement short and specific using the same words every night. If this is difficult for your child, you may have to sit by them to comfort them while they fall asleep. Slowly shorten the number and length of time that you do this.
- The simpler the routine, the easier it will be for your child to learn to fall asleep on their own, and the easier it is for adults to follow.
- Try to be as consistent as you can. If you start and stop this strategy, it will take longer for your child to learn.

6 Waking up in the Middle of the Night

- Go into their room if they are getting out of bed and encourage them to go back to bed.
- It is okay to let your child play in bed as long as they are safe, stay in bed and are not disruptive.
- Remind them if they stay in bed, you will come in and check on them on a regular basis. The check can be a quick wave, pat or blowing a kiss.
- If your child gets out of bed, go into his room and encourage them to go back to bed. Praise them as quickly as you can for staying in bed.
- Follow the strategies above if your child gets out of bed.

7 Imagination

- Toddlers are developing an imagination.
- Their dreams or nightmares may scare them.
- Sometimes daytime events scare your child at night, for example, if they have fallen off their bike, they may dream about this and scare themselves.
- If your child has a bad dream, comfort and reassure them.
- Once your child is calm, repeat your typical bedtime routine.

Remember

- Bedtime problems in young children are very common.
- Many young children have trouble going to bed, staying in bed or sleeping through the night.
- You are not alone.

Further Reading

<http://www.capitalhealth.ca/nr/default.asp>

<http://www.investinkids.ca>