



Get your wide-eyed sweetie snoozing peacefully,
no matter how much she resists!

by **LESLIE GOLDMAN** / photographs by **PRISCILLA GRAGG**

YOUR LITTLE one's naps are your bliss, too—at last, some time to power through bills, catch up on email, grab a shower, or close your own eyes. But just as you're patting yourself on the back for getting the routine down, bam! You hear that Muppet voice calling, "I not tired!"

Getting your kid on a nap schedule isn't fun, but boy (or girl!) is it necessary—and

not just for you. She spends every waking hour absorbing information, and her brain needs a break to process it. That break is a nap—which affects her health and growth as much as a night's sleep, helping with memory, focus, emotional regulation, and more, says Shalini Paruthi, M.D., co-medical director of St. Luke's Sleep Medicine and Research Center, in

Chesterfield, Missouri. Unfortunately, whether you have a baby or a preschooler, she probably won't appreciate the importance of her daytime snoozes. Our experts can help you solve the most common nap dilemmas.

"My newborn will only nap in my arms."

This isn't necessarily a bad thing. "If you love holding

your sleeping baby and he's having long, restful naps on you, enjoy, since this time is so fleeting," says Elizabeth Pantley, author of *The No-Cry Nap Solution*. But you can't do that forever. Pantley's advice: Buy a padded crib-mattress cover and sheets made of jersey, flannel, terry, or chenille—fabrics that will make the sensation of being put down less jarring to him.



DADA!
I WAKE.



Another trick: Warm the mattress with a fresh-from-the-dryer towel or a heating pad turned to low. Before you lay your baby down, remove the heat source and rub your arm along the surface to make sure it's not too hot.

“She’s too fussy to sleep.”

We know how badly you need to run that errand, but if you

dash to the store at the wrong moment, you can miss your child’s “nap window”—the snippet of time when she first shows signs of sleepiness and is most likely to doze off. And once babies move into full-on exhaustion, they can catch that dreaded, sob-filled second wind. No snooze, and you both lose.

To get familiar with your baby’s signals, monitor her

LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING

When they’re in a very loud or bright environment like a concert or a party, some infants appear to be napping when they are actually just pretending. “It’s called habituation. They’re shutting down because of all the noise and stimulation,” says Katie Bucklen, M.D., associate professor of pediatrics at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. You’ll know your baby did this if she seems crazy-irritable (instead of refreshed) afterward.

closely in the morning. (It’s simplest to spot the transition when she starts off happy and alert.) Watch for slow eye blinks, a loss of interest in toys, and evidence of frustration. Each child is unique, but Pantley says most newborns will display these nap-window signs after 45 minutes to an hour of awake time. By 6 months, that stretch lengthens to two to three hours; by 12 months, three to five hours; by 18 months, she needs only one solid afternoon nap. More obvious signs—eye-rubbing, yawning, fussing—mean she’s officially overtired.

“He naps at day care but never for me!”

Don’t take it personally. “He’s in a consistent environment there with positive peer pressure because all of the other children are lying down,” says Dr. Paruthi. So when the weekend rolls around, try to mimic that day-care sleep environment by starting the nap at the same time, dimming the lights to a similar level, cranking the same decibel of white noise, and using an identical blanket or lovey. Ask his caregivers for insight too: They may know of a book he usually reads or a song he often hears just before going down.

“When my 15-month-old takes two naps, she refuses to go to sleep at night. But she’s a cranky mess with only one.”

Sounds like she’s—dun, dun, *dunnn*—transitioning! Moving from two naps to one is a tricky phase that may last a few months and typically



1

Outfit him appropriately.

Swaddle your baby until he seems ready to roll over; after that, put him in a sleep sack or soft, comfy clothing. Use a nighttime diaper so wetness doesn’t shortchange his sleep.

2

Plug her up.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends giving babies a pacifier whenever they sleep to reduce the risk of SIDS. If your sweetie isn’t passionate about pacis, keep offering one anyway at the start of each nap. It could soothe her, but it’s no big deal if she never takes to it.

3

Pretend it’s bedtime.

Re-create the sequence of events that brings on nighttime sleep: “dinner” (i.e., lunch), a change into pj’s, books. Then turn off the lights. After about a week, you can start to ease up a bit so that the pre-nap routine isn’t as extensive.

➔ MOMS TOLD US: “THE LAST THING I DID WHILE MY CHILD NAPPED WAS ...stared at his face. ● ... tiptoed around, terrified he’d wake up. ● ...blinked,



How Often Should Your Baby Nap?

Every child is different, but these are the general guidelines.

	NAPS PER DAY	WHAT'S HAPPENING
0 to 3 MONTHS	All naps, all the time	Newborns live like they're in college: party all night, nap all day! That's because an infant's brain may not be making enough melatonin, which governs her developing circadian rhythm. By 2 to 3 months, it starts to regulate and she'll sleep more easily.
4 to 8 MONTHS	2 to 3	The first nap usually occurs about 90 minutes after your baby wakes up; the second is 2 or 3 hours later. The third nap may start between 3:30 and 5:30 P.M., after he's been awake for at least 2 hours.
9 to 14 MONTHS	1 to 2	The first nap generally occurs 2 to 2½ hours after waking. (For many babies, that's 9 or 9:30 A.M.) The second tends to kick off 2½ to 3 hours after the first nap ends, but usually no earlier than noon. Both together total 2 to 4 hours.
15 to 18 MONTHS	1 to 2	By 18 months, many kids are down to one nap, lasting between 1 and 3 hours and starting just after lunch, when energy levels dip. Try not to let this nap extend too late, which can sabotage bedtime.
1½ to 3 YEARS	1	These kids are all over the nap map. Some snooze every afternoon for 3 hours; others might skip some days and be perfectly fine with 1½ hours the rest of the time.

happens between 15 and 18 months. Flexibility is key if you want to stay sane. Know that if your child takes a single 60- to 90-minute nap one day, she'll probably need two naps the next, and vice versa, says Dr. Paruthi. A 20-minute snooze between 8:30 and 10:30 A.M. or an earlier bedtime (around 7 P.M.) could also help her adapt. Some signs your darling will soon make the leap:

- The morning nap drifts later or grows shorter (30 to 45 minutes).
- When you put her down for her morning nap, she plays for 30 to 60 minutes before nodding off.
- She can easily skip the morning nap one or two days in a row, but the next morning she crashes before 9:30 A.M.
- She falls asleep between 10 A.M. and noon, dozes for at least an hour, then skips her afternoon nap and is cranky.

By 18 months, this flexibility should get you to the endgame: a two-hour midday nap from, say, noon to 2 or 1 to 3 P.M.

“My toddler’s a sourpuss after waking from a nap.”

If he goes down smiling like Daniel Tiger but wakes up as Oscar the Grouch, his nap may have been too short, and instead of being truly awake, he’s actually between sleep cycles. Try rocking him back to sleep, then gently ease him into bed for another 20 minutes to an hour.

“She’s on a nap strike!”

Your little one may be hitting a developmental milestone, like starting to crawl or boosting her vocabulary. When she’s engrossed in learning, it can be hard to turn off her brain

long enough to fall asleep. Give her ample time to practice her new skill, like crawling in the morning, then return to a familiar activity (like reading or singing) a half hour before naptime to help quiet her mind.

Also consider tweaking her bedtime. Unlike adults, who crave a nap the day after staying up late, little ones sleep *less* when they are sleep-deprived. The later they go to bed, the more tired and cranky they are, but the less likely they are to nap well, says Lisa Medalie, Psy.D., a sleep-medicine specialist at the University of Chicago. Keep your consistent routine in place (like a bath and books), but move the timing up by 15 minutes or more.

Even though your 2-year-old may insist that enough is enough with the nap, most kids can benefit from daytime rest until age 3—or they may skip it on a busy Saturday but be coaxed into a weekday nap. However, no matter how much we wish they’d “siesta forever,” many little ones do quit napping (sob!) between age 3 (when 65 percent still snooze) and age 5 (when the number drops to 15 percent).

So how do you know when it’s time? Pantley says you can assume your child still needs that afternoon snooze if he refuses to nap but falls asleep in the car, has early-evening energy slumps followed by second winds, or wakes up during the night. But you can go ahead and replace naptime with a rest period if he is mostly in good spirits, goes down for the night at a reasonable time, and sleeps till morning. Enjoy those last breaks while you can! ☺

because that was the length of his nap. ● ...went to the bathroom alone. ● ...begins with s and ends with x. ● ...organized my pantry. With labels. ● ...napped!”