

Nine at Night

Nine Tips for a Good Night's Sleep

By father and pediatrician Dr. Zak Zarbock

TIP 1: Consistency is Key

Nothing is more important to sleep than a consistent schedule. Whenever possible, keep bedtimes and routines the same across every night of the week. Avoid letting children stay up later and sleep in longer on weekends. The three-hour shift in your child's sleep cycle is like the jet lag felt the morning after a flight from New York to California.



TIP 2: Create a Sleep Friendly Bedroom

Bedrooms should be dark, quiet, and slightly cool. Get rid of the television set and other bedroom distractions. Avoid using the bedroom for punishments or time-outs, making it a comfortable place where children can feel safe. You can also equip your child to handle nighttime fears by providing a nightlight, stuffed animals, or flashlight.

TIP 6: Going to Sleep is Not a Game

Many children try to "escape" sleep by calling for parents or leaving their beds. Wait a few seconds to respond and then firmly remind your child that it is time to be asleep. Limits should be communicated, consistent, and enforced.



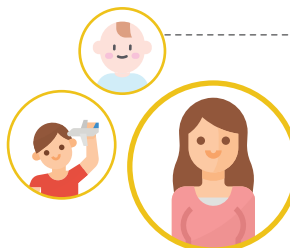
TIP 3: Stick to a Routine

Dedicating 20-30 minutes each night to the same bedtime routine allows both younger and older children the chance to wind down and prepare for sleep. Dim the lights and turn down the volume. Avoid high-energy play too close to bedtime, as it can leave children feeling "wired" for several hours.



TIP 7: Know the Numbers

Age:	Sleep Need
3-12 months	14 to 15 hours
1-3 years	12 to 14 hours
3-5 years	11 to 13 hours
5-12 years	10 to 11 hours
12-18 years	8 to 9 hours



TIP 4: Go "e"-Free in the Evening

In our device driven world, it's not enough to just keep the TV off before bedtime. Studies have shown that the light emitted from electronics, including handheld devices, electronic books, and video games, can interfere with normal sleep cycles.

TIP 8: Brighten the Day and Stay Active

The morning sun or other bright lights will help shift the timing of your child's natural sleep cycle. Early light exposure will result in earlier evening drowsiness. Daily physical activity will also improve your child's ability to fall and stay asleep.



TIP 5: Teach How to Sleep

It's common for children to wake up in the middle of the night. By allowing your child to fall asleep in her own bed, without you holding her or lying by her side, she will be able to learn to go back to sleep on her own. Check on your child as often as you would like, but the goal is to have your child fall asleep independently.



TIP 9: No Caffeine for Bedtime Snack

Caffeine should be avoided in children altogether, but especially during the 3-4 hours before bedtime. A light snack of warm milk and cookies, bananas, or nuts can help relax children.

