

Sleep and settling for early childhood

Factsheet 4: Typical sleep behaviour: toddlers 1–2 years



Summary

- At this age, toddlers generally sleep 10 – 14 hours in a 24-hour period, including daytime naps of one to three hours.
- Some toddlers may still wake at night and will need you to comfort them, especially if they have night-time fears.
- Around 18 months, some toddlers experience sleep regression - if they usually sleep well, they may suddenly refuse to go to sleep or wake up during the night. This is temporary and usually resolves as your child gets older.

Sleep patterns and behaviours

From approximately 12 months of age, toddlers generally sleep longer, wake up less often and sleep more at night.

Toddlers aged 12 months to two years often sleep 10–14 hours within a 24-hour period, including one to three hours of naps.

This helps to ensure they have energy to grow and function at their best.

Every child is different so don't worry too much if your toddler has different sleep patterns to those described here. If you are concerned about your child, contact your maternal and child health nurse, doctor or the Maternal and Child Health Line on Tel: 13 22 29.

Sleep rhythms

Around this time, your toddler may reduce the number and length of naps they take from two naps to one longer daytime nap.

Your toddler will usually sleep for longer periods overnight, but night waking is still common in some toddlers.

It is normal for toddlers to develop night-time fears. Your toddler may need additional comfort because of this.

They may also become more emotionally attached to parents or caregivers, which can cause separation anxiety and distress at bedtime. More information about anxiety in children, can be found on the Better Health Channel <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health>>.

They may start to resist going to sleep at night and want to stay up with the family. This generally peaks at around 18 months of age and tends to go away with age.

Settling

Some parents and caregivers might find that sleep or settling becomes a concern.

Environmental factors and family relationships are particularly important in this age group to help toddlers sleep and to prevent sleep concerns from arising. Try to be responsive to your child's needs – it is important your toddler knows you are emotionally and physically available if they become distressed. You can do this by knowing your

toddler's cues, tired signs and the intensity of their cry. By understanding and connecting with your toddler you will be able to support positive sleep patterns.

Routines and environments play a big part in helping toddlers to get to sleep – they need a cue to tell them when it is sleep time, which is usually something in their external environment. It could be a dark room or having familiar objects around them.

Limiting screen time at night and having a regular bedtime routine, such as bath, book, song and bed, can also help to prevent and reduce settling difficulties and waking at night.

Sleep regression

From around 18 months of age, some toddlers who usually sleep well suddenly refuse to go to sleep, or they wake up during the night and do not go back to sleep by themselves.

This is known as **sleep regression**.

Sleep regression is usually temporary and can occur at many points in a child's life.

It is often associated with periods of high growth and development, but it can also be brought on by factors such as:

- Teething
- a change in routine
- sickness
- travel
- stress.

If your toddler experiences sleep regression, stay consistent with bedtime routines. Be calm, and comfort and reassure your child as necessary, but be firm that bedtime means it's time to go to sleep.

Some strategies you can use to develop positive sleep behaviour include:

- Connecting with your toddler – by building a strong relationship so they feel safe and secure
- recognising and responding to **tired signs**
- using positive and consistent **bedtime routines**
- **cot-to-bed transition** – moving your toddler from a cot to a bed if they are trying to climb out of their cot. Make sure the furniture and sleep environment are safe.

To learn more about each of the things in this list, download 'Factsheet 9: Preventing sleep concerns: toddlers 1–3 years' [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health) <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health>>.

To receive this form in an accessible format [email Maternal and Child Health and Parenting <MCH@dhhs.vic.gov.au>](mailto:MCH@dhhs.vic.gov.au).

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Available at the [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health) <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health>>.

This factsheet is based on research undertaken by KPMG on behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services. The research included a comprehensive overview of contemporary research and evidence-based approaches and interventions for sleep and settling in early childhood. It considered developmentally appropriate strategies and cultural diversity. Download the full research report from the [MCH Service webpage](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/maternal-child-health) <<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/maternal-child-health>>.