

## Getting enough sleep crucial for infants, children

BY ROSEMARY BLACK

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Three months of sleepless nights left new mother Pam Rabin feeling "desperately exhausted." But instead of just resigning herself to feeling like a zombie as her newborn partied into the wee hours, she called Soho Parenting, a center that offers instruction and consultations for a variety of child care issues. Three nights after she was taught how to get kids to sleep, Max was snoozing from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. - and taking daytime naps, too.

How did she "sleep train" her three-month-old in three nights? "We learned to set limits and to put him in his crib while he was still awake," says this Upper West Side mom, a pianist who's married to Jeff Rabin, a vice president at Christie's Auction House. "The program also taught us how important sleep is for babies."

Not just for babies for older children, too. And yet most kids don't get the recommended amount of sleep for their age group, according to the National Sleep Foundation. On average, kids don't even meet the low end of the range recommended by experts, and 76 percent of parents are unsatisfied with their child's sleep habits.

"The lack of uninterrupted, solid sleep for children is a big problem today," says Lisa Spiegel, who conducts sleep training sessions at Soho Parenting (their website is [www.sohoparenting.com](http://www.sohoparenting.com).) "Our culture is running on less sleep than it needs."

Kids don't sleep as long or as soundly as they did years ago and they don't go to bed as early because they're not as active, says Dr. Sally Goldberg, an early childhood expert whose website is [www.dr.sallyparenting.com](http://www.dr.sallyparenting.com). Kids spend more time in front of the computer or TV and less time playing outside. To make matters worse, kids are rushed around so relentlessly from one activity to the next that by the time bedtime rolls around, they're so hyped up sleep is the last thing they feel like doing.

Enrolling in a parenting sleep class is one tactic that sleep-deprived moms and dads try. At Soho Parenting, parents are told to set some strong limits with their kids. For a baby, that may mean letting him cry in his crib for a couple of nights. For an older child, it may mean that he's annoyed at having an earlier bedtime than peers.

What many parents don't realize is how much sleep kids really need. Infants under 11 months old need 14 to 15 hours a day, toddlers need 12 to 14 hours, kids ages three to six need 11 to 13 hours, and school-aged children in grades one to five need 10 to 11 hours. Teenagers need between 8-1/2 and 9-1/2 hours of sleep each night but are averaging between 7 and 7-1/2 hours a night. Only 20 percent of teens get more than 8-1/2 hours of sleep per night, says Jodi Mindell, Ph.D., author of "Sleeping Through the Night" (HarperCollins, 2005).

Spiegel says the parents she counsels are surprised at how much sleep their kids optimally need - and they like how their kids act when they get enough sleep. "When your child is getting enough sleep and therefore you are getting enough sleep, it is the difference between night and day in the family life," she says. "Everyone is functioning at a much higher level."

So what can a parent do to set the stage for a good night's sleep?

Take a daily family walk or bike ride for half an hour or so, Goldberg says. Or plan on a time each day when your child can be outside having unstructured play time - under your supervision, Goldberg says.

It's also crucial to set a firm bedtime and stick to it. "Our bodies are cyclical," Goldberg says. "If a cycle is reinforced night after night, the body gets used to that."

Don't be afraid to tell your child his bedtime is 8 p.m. But also don't worry if your child's still awake after being in bed for 20 minutes. It should take about 15 to 20 minutes to fall asleep, Goldberg says. (By the way, if you're out the minute your

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head hits the pillow, you're sleep deprived, she says.)

Have a routine, says Spiegel. Kids thrive on routine and they like to know what comes next. Start winding down at the same time every night. You might start with a bath, then a story, then some nice physical snuggling and holding and then saying goodnight.

If your child cries when you leave her bedroom, tell him you'll sit outside his door until he is asleep. Each night, move a little further away from the door.

Your goal is for your child to be able to get himself to sleep, so don't let your baby or toddler fall asleep in your arms. Put him into the bed drowsy but awake, so he'll learn how to fall asleep. When he wakes up in the middle of the night, he'll be able to fall back to sleep on his own, too.

Experiment with various tactics to see what works for you. Kathy Vance, a Greenwich Village mom of two, tried everything when her daughter, Dinah, now 5, was an infant who never slept. The Vances tried white noise machines, fans and vacuum cleaners. Then one night, they rolled Dinah's crib into their room, lowered the side, and set it right beside their bed. "It was a modified cosleeping arrangement that resulted in everyone getting the maximum amount of sleep. No, she's still not a perfect sleeper but it really helped," says Vance.

Help your older child be a good sleeper. Keep the TV and computer out of the bedroom. Charge your child's cell phone in a place other than his room - too tempting for him to answer late night calls and text message. Invite your child to check out the kids' activities relating to sleep at [www.sleepforkids.org](http://www.sleepforkids.org).

The bottom line when it comes to getting your kid to sleep, is "repetitiveness, firmness and consistency," Spiegel says.

Learn to recognize sleep problems like snoring, stalling and resisting going to bed. If your child's daytime behavior reflects his lack of sleep - he's overtired, sleepy and cranky - discuss this with your doctor.

Says Pam Rabin: "I'm just a real believer in the old 'the baby who gets enough sleep is a happy baby' philosophy."

To say nothing about the happiness of the parents who are suddenly getting enough sleep.

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Drowsy teens and driving don't mix, and the danger is that these kids are at a much higher risk of having a serious accident. Now the National Sleep Foundation is launching its first annual Drowsy Driving Prevention Week, a nationwide campaign to save the lives of young drivers by raising awareness of the dangers of driving while sleepy. The week will be November 5 to 11, right after the change back from Daylight Savings Time. The NSF is also relaunching its newly redesigned site, [www.drowsydriving.org](http://www.drowsydriving.org).