APPRENDRE À DORMIR

How much sleep does my baby or child need?

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The answer to this question is not simple and cannot be limited to one number. The need for sleep varies greatly among children and their ages. Moreover, sleep duration does not explain everything. It is an important factor for health, but it is not the only guarantee of good health and development. Sleep can be compared to nutrition. Eating an apple a day is not enough to reduce health risks. It takes a sufficient quantity and variety of foods to achieve a balance that is unique to each individual.

> Applying a simple blanket rule is not possible to establish the optimal duration of sleep because it is necessary to know the specific needs of your child.

For sleep to promote health and development, **its duration must be associated with the reality of sleep trains:**

- **Regularity**, avoiding variations of more than 1 h 30 on weekdays and 2 h on weekends.
- **Respecting the natural timing** of each person's biological clock, i.e. finding the ideal wake and bedtime that allows for optimal functioning and trying to stick to it as much as possible. This is sometimes a challenge in our early bird society.
- **Taking into account the signs of lack of sleep** in order to respect the biological clock.

- A **sleep environment adapted to the needs of the child and the parents** (temperature, mattress, room, etc.) that will ensure a good quality of sleep.

The table below shows the recommended number of hours of sleep over a 24-hour period by age group, which includes nighttime and daytime sleep, i.e., nap(s). Note that it is sleep deprivation that is of concern, as it is a health risk factor. You can **use this chart as a gauge** and watch your child carefully to see if he or she is approaching the minimum or maximum recommended hours for his or her age group. Also you should observe your child to ensure that he is not showing **signs of lack of sleep, which are the real indicators of sleep debt**.

Recommended hours of sleep by age group

Age	Daily recommended sleep durations
Newborns (1-3 months)	approximately 14-17 hours A great level of variability in sleep needs have been observed in newborns. This is why some experts believe that, for this age range, daily sleep recommendations should not be used.It is recommended to follow the baby's rhythm punctuated by his vital needs such as hunger, diaper changes and sleep phases (1-2 hours).
Babies (4-11 months)	approximately 12-16 hours
Toddlers (1-2 years)	approximately 11-14 hours
Preschool (3-5 years)	approximately 10-13 hours (with or without a nap)
6-12 years old	approximately 9-12 hours (**without a nap**, as napping after this age can be a sign of sleep debt). It is important to take into account the variability of sleep needs among children.

How can these recommendations be put into practice?

In practical terms, these recommendations allow parents, caregivers and the village **to know that little ones have individual needs for more or less sleep.**

The key to knowing your baby's or child's needs is to rely on signs of lack of sleep. The important thing is not to deprive him of sleep, as much as possible, by providing the opportunity to sleep for the number of hours that are appropriate for him, just as a child is provided with an environment that is conducive to rolling onto his back, crawling, standing up and walking.

Just like learning to walk, there are conditions that are conducive to learning to sleep independently. Hence, if you notice that your child's sleep time is close to the minimum or maximum recommended hours or that he is showing signs of lack of sleep, you can intervene by setting up a routine that will take into account the regularity of bedtime and wake times, the timing and signs of lack of sleep the sleep environment as well as the activities during the day (enough light, not too much screen time, enough exercise, etc.)

Give yourself a few days to see the effects of your interventions and don't change everything at once, as this could cause your child to lose his bearings or become stressed and thus have the opposite effect than the one we are looking for.

How did these recommendations come to be?

Research teams who investigate sleep duration in infants and children have observed variability across all ages. This variability makes scientific consensus more difficult and is reflected in recommendations in hourly ranges, rather than averages, for example.

Indeed, the most recent recommendations of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine are the result of the exhaustive work of more than 13 specialists in sleep medicine and science. In order to establish clear recommendations, they analyzed 864 scientific articles studying the relationship between sleep duration and health, development, performance and longevity. **The chart above summarizes the experts' findings and reminds us that every child is different and has individual needs.**

With this information in hand, you are the best judge of the situation to make confident decisions based on sleep science.

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