



Nap Transition

From Two Naps per Day to One



The transition from two naps a day in a toddler to one is frequently awkward for the child and is described by most parents as anything but smooth. Here are some of the signs indicating a child may be in transition:

- The child is 14 to 19 months old
- The child is put down for the morning nap as usual, but plays for 30 to 60 minutes before falling asleep
- The morning nap gradually drifts later or becomes shorter (30-45 minutes) OR the morning nap becomes longer and the afternoon nap becomes very short
- The child misses a morning nap one or two days without any problem, but the next morning can barely stay awake until 9:30 a.m.
- The child falls asleep between 10 and 12 noon, sleeps only one to one and a half hours, is unable to fall asleep for a second nap, and is crabby all afternoon
- In other words, one nap is not enough, two is too many

Suggestions:

- Know what to expect: most toddlers take weeks to completely settle into one good nap per day, and by the time this occurs, most are 17 months or older. During transition, the child alternates taking one nap one day and two the next, but not in a predictable manner. This makes it impossible to plan the day and parents become extremely frustrated. To make matters worse, they have a child who is tired and crabby.
- Don't try to force a schedule of one nap a day by keeping a child up all morning. This often makes the situation worse. In fact, encourage two naps a day for as long as it seems comfortable for the child. The older the child is during nap transition, the shorter and less troublesome the transition period.
- If one day your child takes one short nap (60 to 90 minutes), the next day probably two naps will occur. Conversely, if a child takes two long naps one day, the next day only one nap may be needed.
- When a nap starts around 10:30-11 a.m., and is only 60 to 90 minutes, you know your toddler will become tired and crabby late in the afternoon. If you put the child down for a nap at 3-4 p.m., she may cry and not be able to fall asleep. Instead, it may be less painful to plan a car or stroller ride around 3-5 p.m. in the hopes that the child may fall asleep for a brief nap. This may be enough to make the toddler less irritable and prevent you from having to put her to bed that night unusually early.
- Some days, a 20-30 minute car or stroller nap between 8:30-10:30 a.m. will be just enough to keep your toddler in a good mood, at the same time enabling him to stay up until 12:30-1:30 p.m. for a "real nap."
- Try a bedtime of 7 p.m. occasionally when your child takes only one nap during the day and it's obvious he needs to catch up on sleep.
- If nap transition has really been a struggle, you may be able to "force" one nap a day or two if your child is at least 16 months or older. Choose one or the other and stick with it for several weeks. To force one nap, the child is pushed to sleep 12 hours at night from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. and one nap is given around noon. The nap will be short, and the child gradually becomes sleep-deprived, therefore it is usually necessary to put the child to bed once a week at 6-6:30 p.m. to supplement sleep. To force two naps per day, the child's nighttime sleep is reduced to help increase the need for daytime naps. The first two nights, the child's nighttime sleep is restricted to about 9 to 9^{1/2} hours at night (from about 9:30-10 p.m. to 7 a.m.), then two naps are given during the day. Following this, the child's sleep at night is maintained at about 10 hours (from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m.) and two naps are given each day. The child reverts to one nap a day around 18 months, or whenever the child seems ready.

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