



# SLEEP NEEDS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

- Sleep need gets less with age until around 20 years old when it stabilises.
- How much and how fast this happens depends on the person.
- It is normal for children to have daytime naps until 3 to 5 years old.
- If a child takes naps often past this age, he or she might not be sleeping enough at night.
- Teenagers will tend to want to go to bed later, and sleep in.
- Older people spend more time in bed, but their sleep requirement is normally similar to that of early adult life.

Note: All words that are underlined relate to topics in the Sleep Health Foundation Information Library at [www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au](http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au)

## 1. How do our sleep needs change with age?

It is well known that as children get older they need less sleep. Different people have different sleep needs. The advice in the table below is only a guide. You can make a good guess if a person is sleeping enough at night - observe how they act and function during the day.

AGE	RECOMMENDED	MAY BE APPROPRIATE	NOT RECOMMENDED
<b>Newborns</b> <b>0-3 months</b>	14 to 17 hours	11 to 13 hours 18 to 19 hours	Less than 11 hours More than 19 hours
<b>Infants</b> <b>4-11 months</b>	12 to 15 hours	10 to 11 hours 16 to 18 hours	Less than 10 hours More than 18 hours
<b>Toddlers</b> <b>1-2 years</b>	11 to 14 hours	9 to 10 hours 15 to 16 hours	Less than 9 hours More than 16 hours
<b>Preschoolers</b> 3-5 years	10 to 13 hours	8 to 9 hours 14 hours	Less than 8 hours More than 14 hours
<b>School-aged Children</b> <b>6-13 years</b>	9 to 11 hours	7 to 8 hours 12 hours	Less than 7 hours More than 12 hours
<b>Teenagers</b> <b>14-17 years</b>	8 to 10 hours	7 hours 11 hours	Less than 7 hours More than 11 hours
<b>Young Adults</b> <b>18-25 years</b>	7 to 9 hours	6 hours 10 to 11 hours	Less than 6 hours More than 11 hours
<b>Adults</b> <b>26-64 years</b>	7 to 9 hours	6 hours 10 hours	Less than 6 hours More than 10 hours
<b>Older Adults</b> <b>≥ 65 years</b>	7 to 8 hours	5-6 hours 9 hours	Less than 5 hours More than 9 hours

The above sleep duration recommendations are based on a report of an expert panel convened by the US based National Sleep Foundation and published in 2015 in their journal Sleep Health.



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## 2. How does napping change with age?

From birth to two months of age, the length of one period of sleep can be from 30 minutes to 3-4 hours. This is throughout the day and night. Babies fed from the bottle tend to sleep for longer at a time than breast-fed babies (3-4 hours versus 2-3 hours). See also [Tips to Help Babies Sleep Better](#).

From 2 months onwards babies start to sleep for longer at a time. This is especially so at night between 12 midnight and 5am. The reason for this is that they start to develop their internal day-night (circadian) rhythm that favours sleep at night and being more awake during the day.

By 6 months of age, babies can get 5 – 8 hours of sleep at night. However 25-50% of 6 month olds still wake up at night. There are things that can be done to counteract this including ensuring that they learn to go to sleep in their cot by themselves at the start of the night. Then they are more able to self-soothe themselves back to sleep after waking up during the night.

From 2 months to 12 months, the number of daytime naps goes down from 3 - 4 naps to two naps. Morning naps usually stop between 12 and 18 months of age.

Always give a chance for an afternoon nap after lunch and before 4pm. Daytime naps become less common from about 2 or 3 years onwards.

Consistent daytime naps after 5 years of age are not normal. The child might not be getting enough sleep at night. This may be due to poor sleep routines, sleep problems or sleep disorders. It may need to be followed up with a Sleep Specialist.

See also [Behavioural Sleep Problems in School Aged Children and/or Children's Sleep Disorders](#).

## 3. Why do teenagers want to stay up later?

In this age group, there is a change in the timing of sleep. It is natural for them to want to go to bed later at night and to sleep in. However this should be within reason and teenagers often need to be taught good sleep habits. They need to know that they won't function as well during the day if they miss sleep and fail to catch up on it. See also [Teenage Sleep](#).

## 4. Adult sleep

Sleep requirements stabilize in early adult life, around the age of 20. Individuals vary in their sleep needs but most adults require between 7 and 9 hours a night to feel properly refreshed and function at their best the next day. Many try to get away with less sleep. There are some who are genuine short sleepers while others may require considerably more than the average requirement. The reasons for this individual variability in sleep requirement are not well understood.

Older adults spend more time in bed but unless a sleep problem has developed the requirement for sleep is similar to that in their younger adult life.

## 5. Where can I find out more about sleep needs across the lifespan?

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

[www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

For information on over 60 different sleep related topics, written by professionals, visit the Sleep Health Foundation Information Library at [www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au](http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au). The underlined topics in this article are covered in detail there.



**Sleep Health Foundation**

114/30 Campbell Street, Blacktown NSW 2148  
T: +61 (0) 2 8814 8655 F: +61 (0) 2 9672 3884



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[www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au](http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au)

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Disclaimer - Information provided here is general in nature and should not be seen as a substitute for professional medical advice. Ongoing concerns about sleep or other medical conditions should be discussed with your local doctor.

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