



Sleep and Settling 0–5 years

The Importance of Sleep

Sleep is necessary for a child's healthy growth and development, particularly in maintaining a strong immune system. Children who sleep and eat well are often happier and less irritable.

Typical Sleep Patterns

- Sleep patterns are noticeable in the womb during the latter half of pregnancy.
- Cycle times vary between 40-60mins.
- Periods of sleep represent about 50% at 30 weeks and 60% near term.

Birth to 12 Months

- Babies will show signs they are ready for sleep after 1-1.5 hour of wakefulness.
- Total sleep time per 24 hours lasts 14-18 hours.
- Sleep cycles develop around 4 months of age ranging from 30-50mins.
- Try to resettle if the child wakes before one hour of sleep during the day – this encourages the transition from one sleep cycle to the next.

Age 1 to 5 Years

- Total sleep time reduces from about 17 hours down to 10-12 hours by the age of 5.
- Mostly accounted for by the decrease in daytime sleeps.



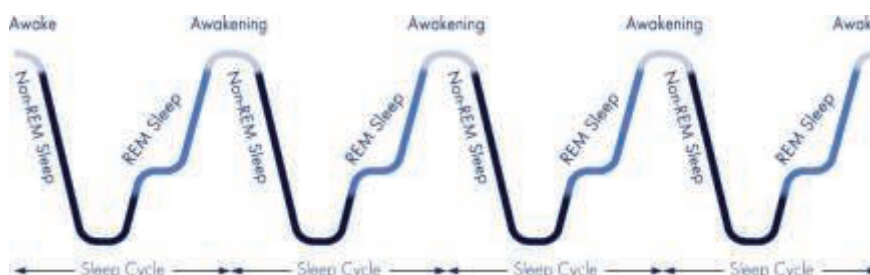
- Cycle length increases from 40 minutes at 2 years to 60 minutes at 5 years.

Settling

Many babies need to learn how to settle and resettle themselves to sleep. This is simply falling asleep on their own without any assistance from an adult. There will be crying and fussing while they are learning. They need you to respond to them for comfort and reassurance so that they feel secure and loved.

At about 2 months, children begin to establish their awake and asleep rhythms. This is the time to begin to establish day/night bedtime routines.

(For more information on age specific sleep, please go to [You and Your Family](#)).





Taking Care of Yourself

If you're feeling tired right now you're not alone!

Many parents say that being a parent is the toughest job they ever had. Having your sleep interrupted every night for weeks, and months on end can make your life really difficult.

It is important to make sure you are taking care of yourself, especially if you plan to make some changes. Place these "taking care of yourself" points up somewhere you can see them often each day as a reminder.

- Share your workload – which tasks can you share with other members of the family? Include your partner, older children, extended family and friends and ask them how they can help out.
- Try to drink eight glasses of fresh water each day – if you are dehydrated you will feel even more groggy and lethargic.
- Take as many cat naps as you can through the day – frequent mini-naps (5-30minutes) are really helpful for tired bodies and can help you get through the tough days and nights.
- Keep some quick to prepare, healthy food in your fridge - for example, fruit, vegetables, cheese, yoghurt or muesli bars. Try to grab a snack every couple of hours rather than skipping meals.
- Have a "calm-down" plan - if you feel angry, stressed out, annoyed or tearful – what can you do to calm yourself? Plan to phone a friend or do deep breathing exercises, run around the garden or whatever works for you. Practice your plan.
- Try to keep up with an activity that you enjoy – it might be just listening to music, grabbing a newspaper each day, catching up with a friend for a quick coffee or doing exercise. These sorts of activities will help you stay in touch with yourself.

Ngala's View on "Controlled Crying"

You may have heard "controlled crying / comforting" used as a method to modify babies / toddlers sleep. This can mean different things to different people.

At Ngala we promote gentle settling and we do not agree with leaving babies distressed.

For more information on sleep go to the [You and Your Family](#) section of the Ngala website and click on the age appropriate to your baby/child.

Controlled crying is often associated with babies/ children left to cry for a period of time.

Babies/toddlers are distressed when they are not responded to when they are crying. Babies and toddlers develop in the context of relationships and are highly sensitive to the nurturing they receive from caregivers.

As early as 6 weeks of age, newborns become distressed if their interpersonal relationships with caregivers are even slightly disrupted.

Responding to children when they cry promotes a sense of security as they transition to sleep and when adapting to a different way of settling to sleep. It is important to provide reassurance and support for babies and toddlers when they learn to self-settle to sleep.

If you need more help, please contact the [Ngala Helpline](#).

This handout was prepared using information from various sources. References are available on request.

Contact ngala@ngala.com.au