

# From Two Naps to One



At my toddler playgroup's gatherings, it doesn't take long for the chats to morph into a brainstorming session about our kids' sleep. We've all come to appreciate that a well-rested child is a happy child. Toward the end of our baby's first year, most of us had mastered a daytime routine consisting of two naps (one in the morning and one in the afternoon) averaging an hour and a half each. But around the 12-month mark, the babies began waging a mini revolt.

**Toddlers** tend to sleep more soundly at night than babies do, so it's common for their napping habits to shift. "Children usually go from two naps to one sometime between ages 1 and 2," says Harvey Karp, M.D., author of *The Happiest Baby Guide to Great Sleep*. Figuring out when and how to make the move can be tricky -- but you can follow this blueprint.

## Look for the Signs

There are lots of ways your child may let you know his napping schedule needs tweaking. Some toddlers may take longer to nod off or become cranky when you try to put them down during the day. Others might sleep well in the morning and then resist the afternoon nap. Or your child might wake up earlier from both naps. You might also notice that when your kid misses his afternoon rest one day, he makes it to bedtime without melting down. "If you see consistent changes in your toddler's sleep pattern for about two weeks, it may be time to transition to one nap," says Kim West, a children's sleep therapist and coauthor of *The Sleep Lady's Good Night, Sleep Tight*.

## Consider Your Options

Making the switch before your child is ready can lead to miserable days and a return to nighttime wake-ups, since overtired kids tend to sleep worse than well-rested ones. Before you decide to consolidate naps, see whether fiddling with your toddler's schedule solves the problem, suggests West. If she takes a very long morning nap and then melts down in the afternoon, see if ending her A.M. snooze early makes her more cooperative for the second. If waking her up after 75 minutes doesn't help, keep shortening it. However, don't cut any nap to under 45 minutes; your child needs that much time to complete a sleep cycle.

"Right after Devlin turned 1, she spent her afternoon naptime crying, standing up, or tossing and turning," says Dryden Watner, from Westfield, New Jersey. But without the second snooze, Devlin turned into a cranky mess and often had fitful nights. After a bit of experimenting, Watner moved her daughter's afternoon nap later by an hour.

Devlin stopped fighting it and was able to get the rest she needed to make it till bedtime.

## Make Changes Gradually

Most toddlers go through a "one nap is too little, two is too many" phase, which can last from a few weeks to two months. Once you conclude that your kid is ready to make the switch, start steering him toward a single midday siesta. Begin by pushing the morning nap later by 15 minutes every day or two. Your ultimate goal is to start it shortly after lunch. By that time, your exhausted toddler should sack out for two to two-and-a-half hours. If your child is used to waking up after an hour, see if you can soothe him back to sleep. You can also use a white-noise machine, which may help him sleep longer. "If all else fails, this is the time to use one of your standby techniques, such as putting your toddler in the [stroller](#) or taking a drive, to ensure he gets the refresher he needs," says West.

## Smooth Rough Patches

During this transitional time, your toddler may be a bit sleep-deprived. So as you switch to one nap, try to ease her morning crankiness by establishing "quiet time," during which you read or listen to soft music, says [George J. Cohen, M.D.](#), a pediatrician and author of *American Academy of Pediatrics Guide to Your Child's Sleep: Birth Through Adolescence*. Consider moving her dinner and bedtime earlier to make up for the reduced daytime sleep. You should also be open to an occasional two-nap day when your child seems to need it.

If her sleep schedule at day care doesn't align with the routine that works for your child at home, talk with the staff about coming up with a plan that works better for her, suggests West. You might even ask whether it's possible to move your child to a different room at the center during rest time. But don't stress out too much if the director is unable to accommodate you: Lots of children do perfectly fine following one sleep pattern during the week and a contrasting one on weekends. Gradually, the two will be in sync and you won't need to worry about her napping routine again ... at least until age 3 or 4, when she's most likely to give up daytime sleep for good.

*Originally published in the August 2013 issue of Parents magazine.*

**Parents** Parents.com

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