



Your Thirteen to Eighteen Month Old Toddler and Sleep

At this age toddlers need an average of eleven and a quarter hours of uninterrupted sleep at night and two and a quarter to two and a half hours during the day. Children at the younger end of this age bracket take two naps, in the morning and afternoon, but by eighteen months most consolidate to one midday or afternoon nap. Young toddlers are prone to behavioral sleep problems. Their increased mobility (including walking), a peak in separation anxiety around the first birthday, transition to one nap and emotional attachment to such objects as bottles and pacifiers can all complicate bedtime and contribute to nighttime awakenings.

At around fifteen to eighteen months, toddlers transition from two naps to one. That's a tricky stage because there is usually a point when one nap is not enough and two naps are too many. The result is an overtired child who doesn't sleep well at night. (Ask for the handout on Transitioning from Two Naps to One).

As if that wasn't enough, temper tantrums often emerge at this age, and toddlers start testing their parents. Bedtime is a common battleground for toddlers flexing emerging willpower muscles. A soothing bedtime routine is extremely important for children this age, and adhering consistently to routines and setting clear rules is essential—because the next stage is only tougher.

Separation anxiety hits a peak right around the first birthday. Saying "night-night" to parents can be tough. That nice, long transition to bedtime, good focused time with one or both parents, helps ease the fears. Although one year olds can't say much, they understand an awful lot, so give plenty of verbal assurances that you are nearby.

Sample Schedule

(Shift earlier if your child wakes between 6:00 and 7:00 a.m.)

7:00–7:30 a.m.	Wake-up and breakfast.
9:00–9:30 a.m.	Start of one-hour morning nap if she's still taking one. She'll probably want a snack right after the nap.
11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.	Lunch (depending on morning-nap timing).
12:30–1:30 p.m.	Start of afternoon nap. About an hour and a half if it's a second nap, about two to two and a half hours if it's the only nap of the day. Snack after nap.
5:00–5:30 p.m.	Dinner.
6:00–6:30 p.m.	Start bath/bedtime routine.
7:00–8:00 p.m.	Asleep.

Children need regular naptimes, regular bedtimes, and three recognizable mealtimes. Their bodies need the routine to regulate day and night hormone cycles, and to keep them in sync with their internal clocks. Their little hearts and minds need certainty and predictability to feel secure. But I also believe in some flexibility. The sample schedule is a good starting

point, but you can adjust it. You may also have to play with the schedule a bit to accommodate the needs of your other children. Sleep times are averages. Some kids sleep more, some sleep less, but the variations are a lot less than many parents think. If your child is napping and sleeping poorly, chances are you are underestimating how much sleep she needs.

Watch her daytime behavior. If she's easy and content, she's probably on a pretty good schedule. If she's fussy and demanding, she may need longer naps, an earlier bedtime, a later wake-up time—or all of the above. If you have to skip a nap because of a doctor's appointment or some other essential interruption, most toddlers fare better missing the morning nap than the afternoon one. You can temporarily move the afternoon nap up a bit to compensate for a missed morning one.

The first birthday is a common time for toddlers to transition to a cup and milk if they were on formula. If you haven't already done so, introduce a cup to your toddler. At this age most toddlers are beginning to get all of their nutrition and calories from table foods or solids. Ask your pediatrician about average milk intake requirements and make sure you include yogurt, cheese and other forms of calcium and vitamin D. If you are concerned that your toddler is emotionally attached to the bottle, ask for the handout on Bottle Weaning.

