



NAP TRANSITIONS

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NAP TRANSITIONS:

At 6 months, most babies will still need three naps a day (or four naps if a baby is taking shorter naps). As a baby gets closer to 8–9 months, it is very likely that they will be close to transitioning from three naps to two naps. Again, it is important to remember that every baby is different and that you will need to follow your baby's unique rhythm and tune in to what your baby is telling you in order to figure out whether they are ready to make this transition.

Nap transitions can be a really tricky time for a lot of parents and a time when being flexible and present will help to make the transition more manageable.

Before 9 months of age, you will know that a baby is ready for the nap transition when, more often than not, you cannot get the baby down for a third nap. Instead of thinking of this transition as dropping the third nap, you want to think of it as having the first two naps lengthen along with the baby's wake window.

When these wake windows extend, if the baby's nap lengths shorten, then the baby is likely not ready for the transition. We again really want you to follow your baby's lead: Are they still tired by the two-hour mark? Or does it seem like they need another thirty-minutes before being put down for a nap? If a baby is only able to be awake for two hours without being overtired, then it is unlikely that they are ready to make the transition from three naps to two naps.

Here is a sample of one baby's unique rhythm, at 7 months, that is consistently based on two naps:

7:00 a.m.—Wake
9:30–11:15 a.m.—Nap 1
2:00–4:00 p.m.—Nap 2
7:00 p.m.—Asleep

Here is a sample of another baby's unique rhythm at 7 months:

6:30 a.m.—Wake
9:15–10:30 a.m.—Nap 1
1:00–2:20 p.m.—Nap 2
4:45–5:15 p.m.—Nap 3
7:00 p.m.—Asleep

You will need to be flexible—there are days when you might get three naps and days when you might get two naps. The best way to do this is to base it off the length of the first nap. If your baby takes a 30 minute first nap, it is likely that it will be a three nap day for them (as long as they can get the third nap) but if your baby takes a nice, long nap, then it will be a two nap day.

If, for three days in a row you cannot get the third nap, and your baby is taking, for example, two forty-minute naps, then I usually suggest that you space those two naps out to make it through the day. With the baby's schedule above, they may wake at 7, take the first nap at 9:30–10:10 am.

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Then we want to stretch the window between nap # 1 and nap # 2 as we always want to protect the window before bed to prevent any fussiness. So we may need to keep the baby up until 2:30 p.m.- 3:10 p.m. This is a really big window but we will need to do this in order to make sure that the window before bed is not too big, leading to fussiness and therefore making bedtime difficult. We would then aim to have the baby asleep at 6:15 p.m. (this is as early as I would ever suggest to a family), and know that the baby will need some time to adjust to the bigger windows and will likely still be a bit fussy.

You may need to use the carrier or stroller to get the afternoon nap as your baby may have a harder time going down for that nap. Once they baby get used to the bigger windows, then you can move the bedtime back to 6:30 p.m.

Another strategy I like to use if you cannot get the third nap but the other two naps are really short is to try having quiet time in the carrier, where you would strap your baby in snug, facing in, and see if you can just relax with your little one while you walk around the house singing or dancing with them. You want to think of it as getting them to rest, even if you cannot get them to sleep. If you have a really snuggly toddler, you can use this strategy as well but hold them or lay beside them.

I also want to remind you not to turn nap time into a struggle or a fight. When your baby is not napping, you can always try a walk outside to get some fresh air and help to make everyone feel better.

Remember that if you are feeling stressed and frustrated, so is your baby.

TWO NAPS TO ONE:

Around 10–12 months, many parents will struggle with getting two naps in during the day as their babies' wake windows have lengthened, and now their babies are refusing the second nap until really late in the day (therefore pushing bedtime back as well). At this time, a lot of parents will decide to transition their babies to one nap. Making this transition before they are ready can lead to a really overtired baby. Most babies will hold on to two naps until closer to 13–18 months.

Baby-led solution:

You can spend a few days logging that perfect window for the second nap by taking your baby out in the stroller or by bed-sharing the nap. This will remove the pressure to sleep and allow you to avoid getting frustrated. You can count on, for example, an hour-long snuggle session, and then when your baby falls asleep, log that timing. Do this for a few days, and then reflect on your your schedule. Based on that wake window, and your baby still needing two naps, would a slightly later bedtime work to accommodate this?

If your baby falls asleep more easily in the stroller or bed-sharing, could you consider supporting your baby in this way to fall asleep with the shorter window and, therefore, leaving your current schedule as is?

Parent-led solution:

In order to keep a baby's current bedtime and still get two naps, I often times recommend can capping the first nap at one hour. This would mean gently waking your baby at the hour mark. What this will do is allow the you to put your baby down at the same time for their afternoon nap (possibly thirty minutes later) and keep their bedtime around the same time.



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This allows for enough sleep pressure to build up so your baby/toddler can take their second nap. If your toddler will still not take the second nap, I often try capping at 40 minutes, then at 30 minutes and if they will still not take the second nap, then it is time to transition to one nap.

TRANSITION TO ONE NAP:

If your little one is 13 months or older, you may see them start to resist the second nap, even with the first capped nap. If your child is fussy, they are likely still tired and are likely not ready for the one nap. However, if your toddler is happy and plays at the usual morning naptime, then we can slowly work to transition them to one nap.

You will need to move the am nap to 11am for this to become your only nap. Again, this is transition time and the nap cannot stay at 11am.

The nap at 11am, moves to 11:30, moves to 12, moves to 12:30 and stays at 1pm.

If you can only get one short nap, regardless of how tired your baby is, they just won't go down again...try napping at 10:30 or 11am and add a catnap "on-the-go" at 4pm. If you still have a short nap and a tired baby at 4pm, move bedtime earlier... temporarily to adjust, even a 6:15pm bedtime may be needed. Soon baby will connect the naps.

DROPPING THE NAP:

This transition can be very difficult for parents. Not only are you needing to get used to a really crabby toddler mid-day, but you are also losing the hour or two of time that you may have had to yourself.

The biggest sign that a toddler is ready to drop their nap, and this is usually sometime between 2.5 – 3.5 years old, is that the bedtime is getting later. When the nap is interfering with bedtime, and you have moved it as early as you can (sometimes I will recommend an 11:30/12 p.m. nap) and your toddler is still struggling to fall asleep at night, this is when I will recommend starting to consider dropping the nap.

The first thing we can do is to start with capping the nap and see whether this helps. If it does not, I recommend dropping the nap. It is important to know that your toddler is going to be exhausted and really grumpy throughout the afternoon. If you are planning a trip to the park, or anywhere with motion, it is likely that they are going to fall asleep. I always recommend avoiding the car or the stroller around their usual naptimes until they get used to not napping. I also recommend a slightly earlier bedtime until they get used to the nap disappearing (ideally no earlier than 6:30 p.m.).



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