



Shifting schedules – Changing from Two Naps to One Nap

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *The No-Cry Nap Solution*



Children typically switch from two daily naps to one nap sometime between the ages of 12 and 24 months. However, that year of difference is a very long span of time. This tells us that age alone is not the only factor to consider when changing your child's nap routine. This isn't about what your child thinks he wants. It's about the biological need for two naps versus one. Naps at different times of the day serve different purposes in brain development at different ages. Morning naps have more dreaming, or REM sleep, which makes them important for young babies who require it for early brain development. You don't want to rush the process if your child is still benefiting from this important sleep time.



There is another consideration when deciding to make a schedule change: The length of time that your child is awake from one sleep period to the next has an effect on his mood and behavior. The older your child is, the longer he can go between sleep breaks without getting cranky. That's the reason that that young babies need to divide their day up with two naps, but older babies can handle a full day with only one nap.

Since there is a wide range of what's normal it's important to study each child's behavior to see when he is ready to transition to one nap a day. Use the following lists as a guide.

Signs That your Child Needs TWO NAPS Daily.

- Your child is under 12 months old
- When you put your child down for a nap he plays, resists, or fusses for a while but always ends up sleeping for an hour or more
- When you take your child for car rides during the day he usually falls asleep
- If your child misses a nap he is fussy or acts tired until the next nap or bedtime
- Your child is dealing with a change in his life (such as a new sibling, sickness, or starting day-care) that disrupts his nap schedule
- Your child misses naps when you're on the go, but when you are at home he takes two good naps

Signs That Your Child Is Ready to Change to ONE DAILY NAP.

- When you put your child down for a nap he plays or fusses before falling asleep, and then takes only a short nap, or never falls asleep at all
- Your child can go for car rides early in the day and not fall asleep in the car
- When your child misses a nap he is cheerful and energetic until the next nap or bedtime
- Your child naps well for one of his naps, but totally resists the other nap

How to Make the Transition When Signs Point to Change

Instead of thinking in terms of dropping a nap it's better to think in terms of a schedule change. The change from two naps to one nap is rarely a one-day occurrence. Most often there will be a transition period of several months when your child clearly needs two naps on some days, but one nap on others. You have a number of options during this complicated transition time:

- Watch for your child's sleepy signs, and put your child down for a nap when indications first appear.
- Keep two naps, but don't require that your child sleep at both times, allow quiet resting instead.
- Choose a single naptime that is later than the usual morning nap, but not as late as the afternoon nap. Keep your child active (and outside if possible) until about 30 minutes before the time you have chosen.
- On days when a nap occurs early in the day, move bedtime earlier by 30 minutes to an hour to minimize the length of time between nap and bedtime.

