

## BACK TO SCHOOL

Live Better

### How to reset your child's sleep schedule



It's back-to-school time: Do you know when your kid will get to bed?

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You've let your kid obey his natural tendencies for the past two months: sleep in past noon and stay up past midnight. But summer vacation is nearly over. We explain how to help your child get back into a school-year sleep schedule.

#### **Transition into an earlier sleep schedule**

If you've been letting your kid stay up as late as you do over the summer, good luck forcing her into bed two hours earlier the night before the first day of school. Especially if the sun hasn't set yet.

Your child probably had no trouble sleeping in until 11 a.m. on his first day of summer vacation, and that's because our brains can easily adjust to a later sleep schedule, says Jonathan Fleming, co-director of the sleep program at the University of British Columbia Hospital in Vancouver. But "it's very difficult to go against the clock," he says, so make it gradual.

Ease into school-year sleep schedules by setting bedtime back by half an hour each week, Dr. Fleming suggests. The goal is 10 hours of sleep each night for young children, 9 1/2 for 8-to-10-year-olds, and 9 hours for adolescents.

#### **Don't be your kid's snooze button**

Just as getting a phone call in the middle of the night can jar you awake and interrupt the rest of your night's sleep, so can an alarm, Dr. Fleming says. Your body takes that loud, rousing noise as a signal to break out of the sleep cycle. Trying to grab "a few more minutes" by hitting the snooze button won't give you quality rest.

It's even easier for kids to indulge in a later-than-planned wake-up when they have a parent waking them up, since it doesn't take much effort to call out, "Ten more minutes!"

"It's fine to use the parents as an alarm, but they shouldn't be enabling by becoming the snooze alarm," Dr. Fleming says.

Introduce a reward system if necessary (the promise of a special breakfast, for example) to get your child out of bed at the first wake-up call. If she uses an alarm, station it on the other side of the room so she'll have to get out of bed to turn it off.

## **Keep them away from late-night stimulants**

In the same way you should stay away from caffeine as bedtime approaches, it's also a good idea to keep kids away from the soft drinks that will get them hyper.

"Basically, you shouldn't be taking caffeine in after 4 in the afternoon," Dr. Fleming says.

A bigger issue for kids? All the electronic stimulants that will get their minds racing late at night when they should be slowing down: video games, Facebook time and texting. Set up a buffer zone of at least one hour before sleep time in which you restrict your child from using all these devices, Dr. Fleming says.

## **Don't let them sleep in on weekends**

Your child may try to convince you that there's no harm in sleeping in on Saturday and Sunday since he doesn't have to go to school. But allowing him to stay up late and sleep in on the weekend can throw his system out of whack, Dr. Fleming warns.

The ideal system is to wake up at the same time seven days a week. "If you lie in a lot on Saturday morning, Sunday morning, you'll be sleep-saturated come Sunday night," he explains.

That means that trying to enforce an early Sunday-night bedtime will be very difficult and could set off a domino effect for the rest of the week.

**\*And don't do this:** lecture your child about going to bed and waking up early – instead, explain why sleep is important for their health and learning