Sleep is a dynamic activity.
The five stages of sleep progress in a cycle from stage 1 to REM sleep, then the cycle starts over.

What are the stages?

Stage 1 is known as the lightest stage of sleep. At this stage, the body starts to relax and it's easy to drift off into REM (Dreaming) sleep. This is the most common stage from which individuals wake up.

Stage 2 Brain waves continue to slow down.

Stage 3 Both slow brain waves (delta waves) and faster, smaller ones appear during this stage.

Stage 4 Mostly made up of slow brain waves (delta waves), the entire body is deeply relaxed. This is the final stage from which individuals wake up.

Deep sleep

Growth hormones are released during deep sleep. Cells also increase in production and proteins are broken down to release energy from two stages.

REM sleep

REM sleep may play an important role in brain development. Therefore, the more REM sleep your child gets, the better. As your child grows and her brain develops, gradually less time is spent in REM sleep, with most of it occurring at night and during the morning.

Cycles of sleep

REM sleep: normal REM sleep does not occur at this stage.

The brain is always active.

Since the 1950s, we’ve learned that our brains are very active during sleep. Neurotransmitters, or nerve-signaling chemicals in our brains, control whether we are asleep or awake. Neurons, which connect the brain to the spinal cord, produce other neurotransmitters which keep some parts of the brain active during sleep and while awake.

What are dreams?

While sleeping, both adults and children pass through 4 stages of sleep and REM (Rapid Eye Movement)—in repeating cycles throughout the night.

Deep sleep

Growth hormones are released during deep sleep. Cells also increase in production and proteins are broken down to release energy from two stages.

REM sleep

REM sleep stimulates the cerebral cortex, which helps the brain develop learning ability. Scientists believe that’s why infants spend 50% of their time in REM sleep.

ACTION ITEMS

The ABCs of catching ZZZZZs

What’s the best way to help your child develop good sleep habits? There are many expert views about what role parents should play when it comes to helping their children develop good sleep habits. Ultimately, the choice is yours. If you like an approach that:

1. is lenient about responding to your baby when he cries during the night and emphasizes consistent bedtime routines and positive sleep associations, check out Dr. Jodi Mindell’s book, Sleeping Through the Night: How Infants, Toddlers and Their Parents Can Get a Good Night’s Sleep.

2. advocates sticking firmly to routine and letting your child cry at bedtime for extended intervals of time before you provide her with comfort, read Dr. Richard Ferber’s book, Solve Your Child’s Sleep Problems.

3. focuses on training your baby to go to sleep and comfort himself on his own by keeping nighttime feedings brief, waking him if his daytime naps last more than a few hours and using your voice to comfort him when he cries, try the American Academy of Pediatrics’ book, Guide to Your Child’s Sleep.

4. promotes the family bed and other ways of being there for your child to provide a comforting, relaxing sleep environment, look at Dr. William Sears’ book, Nighttime Parenting.

5. emphasizes the prevention of sleep problems and teaches healthy sleep habits by synchronizing soothing techniques with your child’s natural rhythms, read Dr. Marc Weissbluth’s book, Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child.

AND REMEMBER, whichever approach you choose, be consistent.