

## **Why Short Cat-Naps Are Not Good Enough**

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

If your child's naps are shorter than an hour and a half in length, you may have wondered if these brief naps provide enough rest for your little one. You might suspect that these catnaps aren't meeting your child's sleep needs – and you would be right. The science of sleep explains why a short nap takes the edge off, but doesn't offer the same physical and mental nourishment that a longer nap provides.

It takes between 90 and 120 minutes for your child to move through one entire sleep cycle, resulting in a Perfect Nap. It has been discovered that each stage of sleep brings a different benefit to the sleeper. Imagine, if you will, magic gifts that are awarded at each new stage of sleep:

### **Stage 1 - Very light sleep**

Lasts 5 to 15 minutes

#### **The gifts:**

Prepares body for sleep

Reduces feelings of sleepiness

### **Stage 2 - Light to moderate sleep**

Lasts up 15 minutes

#### **The gifts:**

Increases alertness

Improves motor skills

Stabilizes mood

Slightly reduces homeostatic sleep pressure

### **Stage 3 - Deep sleep**

Lasts up to 15 minutes

#### **The gifts:**

Strengthens memory

Release of growth hormone

Repair of bones, tissues and muscles

Fortification of immune system

Regulates appetite

Releases bottled up stress

Restores energy

Reduces homeostatic sleep pressure

### **Stage 4 – Deepest sleep**

Lasts up to 15 minutes

#### **The gifts:**

Same benefits as Stage 3, but enhanced

### **Next Stage – Dreaming**

Lasts up to 9 to 30 minutes

#### **The gifts:**

Transfers short-term memory into long-term memory

Organizes thoughts

Secures new learning

Enhances brain connections

Sharpens visual and perceptual skills

Processes emotions

Relieves stress

Inspires creativity

Boosts energy

Reduces homeostatic sleep pressure (The biological process that creates fatigue and irritability.)

### **Longer naps**

For as long as your child sleeps

#### **The gifts:**

Repeat all of the above stages in cycles

In order for your child to receive all of these wonderful gifts he must sleep long enough to pass *at least once* through each stage of sleep. Longer naps will encompass additional sleep cycles and provide a continuous presentation of gifts.

Newborn babies have unique cycles that slowly mature over time. A newborn sleep cycle is about 40 to 60 minutes long, and an infant enters dream sleep quickly, skipping several sleep stages. Infants need several sleep cycles to receive their full allotment of gifts. If your infant is sleeping only 40-60 minutes at naptime it is an indication that your baby is waking between cycles instead of returning to sleep on his own. We'll cover a plethora of ideas to help your baby learn to go back to sleep without your intervention.

Now you can clearly see why a short nap doesn't provide your baby or young child the best benefits of napping. You can also see why a mini-nap can fool you into thinking it is enough – since the very first five to fifteen minutes reduce feelings of sleepiness and bring that whoosh of second-wind energy that dissipates quickly, resulting in fussiness, crying, crankiness, tantrums and whining.

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From ***The No-Cry Nap Solution: Guaranteed Gentle Ways to Solve All Your Naptime Problems*** by Elizabeth Pantley (McGraw-Hill, January 2009). **Here is the link for information and more excerpts:**  
<http://www.pantley.com/elizabeth/>