

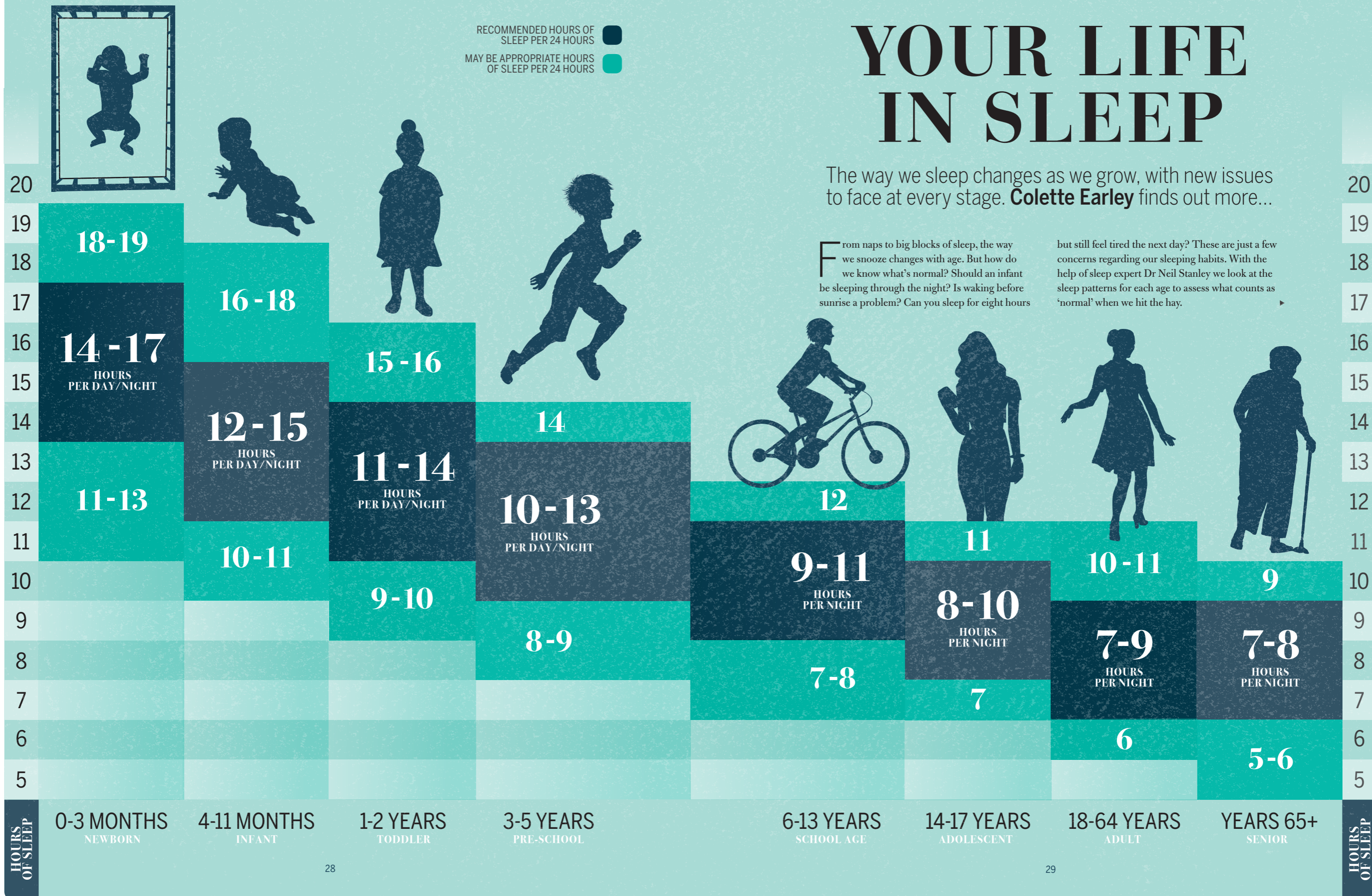
RECOMMENDED HOURS OF SLEEP PER 24 HOURS
 MAY BE APPROPRIATE HOURS OF SLEEP PER 24 HOURS

YOUR LIFE IN SLEEP

The way we sleep changes as we grow, with new issues to face at every stage. **Colette Earley** finds out more...

From naps to big blocks of sleep, the way we snooze changes with age. But how do we know what's normal? Should an infant be sleeping through the night? Is waking before sunrise a problem? Can you sleep for eight hours

but still feel tired the next day? These are just a few concerns regarding our sleeping habits. With the help of sleep expert Dr Neil Stanley we look at the sleep patterns for each age to assess what counts as 'normal' when we hit the hay.





YEARS 0-10

A vital stage of sleep for healthy development

Sleep at this stage in life is crucial, as our brains and bodies are developing at a rapid pace. As any new parent knows, a newborn baby has no concept of day and night, so their sleep is equally divided between the two – but worrying that your baby isn't developing the right sleeping pattern is a common concern for parents. So, what is considered 'normal' sleep for a baby? "On average, from birth to around three months old, a baby will sleep in three- to four-hour periods, followed by one to two hours awake," explains Neil. "At around two to three months, they will sleep mostly during the night."

But don't fret if your baby is still sleeping lots during the day. "In order to get the sleep it needs, a child will still require one or two sleep periods during daytime." However, Neil assures us that every infant is different. He says, "By around nine months, 70 to 80 per cent of children will 'sleep through the night'."

Nonetheless, parents shouldn't worry if their infant isn't doing this – even after 13 months, it's natural for some babies to wake. "Babies don't have a sleep rhythm – they're developing their own rhythm," he says. "And we shouldn't be trying to enforce one just because it's convenient for our lifestyle. The rhythm will come naturally."

As your child grows, their need for regular sleep declines, with most children no longer needing naps by age six. So how many hours should your child be sleeping per day? The National Sleep Foundation (NSF) recommends 11 to 19 hours for newborns (0–3 months), 10 to 18 hours for infants (4–11 months), nine to 16 hours for toddlers (1–2 years), eight to 14 hours for pre-schoolers (3–5 years), and seven to 12 hours for school age (6–13 years).

Neil concludes, "Regardless of how many hours your child sleeps, if they are happy, healthy and thriving, then they are almost certainly getting enough sleep for them as an individual – so don't worry."



YEARS 11-20

As biological rhythms shift, so do sleep patterns

As we pass from childhood to adolescence, the decline in our need for sleep continues. However during our teen years, physical and mental changes mean we still need more sleep than adults.

Teenagers are synonymous with being 'lazy', hibernating under the covers until midday. If you remember your teenage years well, you'll be fully aware that this is usually the result of staying up late the night before. Luckily, there's a good reason for this, as Neil explains: "Teenagers genuinely need to go to sleep later than adults. There is an actual shift in their biological rhythm, which is, at most, only two hours. The recommended bedtime for a teenager is around 11–11.30pm and they should be getting on average about nine to nine and a half hours' sleep."

But many teens don't get the recommended seven to 11 hours of sleep a night. "One study found only 15 per cent reported sleeping at least eight and half hours on school nights," says Neil. This might be why teens can experience tiredness during the day, often falling asleep when they come home from school – or even during class. Their academic workload is also a contributing factor to their tiredness, as well as a demanding social life, after-school activities, high technology usage and diet choices.

"You may blame hormones for why your teenager is moody, but it's more likely they're sleep deprived," says Neil. "High rates of sleeping difficulty are reported in adolescence. A study found that 23 per cent had difficulty falling asleep, 11 per cent woke in the night, and waking in the morning was a problem for 18 per cent."

For more on teenagers and sleep, turn to page 42.



YEARS 21-30

Adulthood can introduce factors that compete with sleep

So you've made it through the tumultuous teenage years, and now you're into the earliest phase of adulthood – things should have evened out a bit, right? Whereas most people think they should have settled into their sleep habits by this point, this is still an ever-changing period of time in someone's life and sleep at this age could still be bringing up a number of issues.

Our twenties tend to be the time when we're trying to establish a lot of things in our lives – from jobs to financial security, serious relationships and an active social life, there's a lot going on. Sleep can often become less of a priority and play second best to everything else that's happening. "There is a lot that is competing against sleep – not only jobs and relationships, but also living conditions such as house-sharing. Life can very much get in the way of sleep," explains Neil.

However, if ever there's a time for surviving on little to no sleep, it's your twenties. At this age, you're still managing to reap the benefits from the sleep you do manage to get. "The good thing about sleep at this age is that you're still getting the deep, restorative slow-wave sleep [SWS] that you need," explains Neil. "You get the good stuff – the refreshing, deep sleep. So if you are partying every night, at this age you can get away with it!" *To learn more about slow-wave sleep see page 12.*



YEARS 31-40

Different adults need different amounts of sleep

Once you've reached adulthood, the number of hours you should be sleeping stays the same throughout, with the NSF recommending between seven to nine hours a night, but it's good to remember this is just a guide. "Many adults aim for eight hours a night, but eight hours is just an average," says Neil. "Sleep-need is like height – it's genetically determined and it's different for everybody. Some people will feel rested after four hours' sleep, while some will need to have around 11 hours. The amount of sleep you need is the amount that allows you to feel awake and focused the next day."

Our late twenties and early thirties should technically be the best time for us in terms of our sleep quality as we're still having SWS, but towards our mid-thirties this deep, restorative sleep starts to decline. On top of this, stress can affect our sleep, and modern-day life presents this to us in all different forms. "Between the ages of 31 to 40, work and financial stress may come to the fore," says Dr Stanley. "Stress is one of the biggest causes of sleep problems, but sleep is one of the best ways of coping with stress."

This is also the time in our lives when a lot of people become parents for the first time. Pregnancy brings its own set of sleep problems, and having a newborn can throw your sleep patterns into disarray. Any new parent will know your needs become second to those of your baby, but sleep deprivation can inhibit your mental processes, reducing your ability to function and manage your emotions. Don't be too hard on yourself during this period – allow yourself to sleep whenever possible.

Find sleep tips for new parents on page 36.



YEARS 41-50

Deep sleep decreases as you become older

While it varies for everyone, SWS has most likely declined by this age and sleep starts to become less refreshing because of this. “There’s nothing you can do to preserve your Slow-Wave Sleep,” says Neil. “It’s something we have to accept is going to happen. We don’t know why it starts disappearing. Perhaps from an evolutionary point of view, it could be because we’ve done all our growing and developing, so there isn’t a need for this type of sleep anymore. With children, there’s a biological pressure to get back to sleep, to get the sleep they need in order to develop mentally and physically. When you’re older, and you’ve done all your developing, the natural pressure isn’t there.”

However, we don’t know why this change happens and why it starts to decline at a particular point, to any particular person – we just know it happens to all of us.”

There are other contributing factors affecting sleep at this age, such as persistent snoring because of the increased weight some people might put on in middle age, plus it’s around this time that men start to regularly need to get up for the bathroom during the night.

Neil reminds us, however, that worrying about our lack of sleep isn’t going to help the situation. “There’s no need to worry about it as there’s nothing you can do about the decline of SWS. You can optimise your sleep as much as possible, but you are not going to get the best nights sleep of your life in your 40s onwards. Your body isn’t demanding it.”



YEARS 51-60

Factors such as pain and menopause can affect sleep

Sleep becomes less consolidated, and more easily disturbed as we get older, and there are more factors that will disrupt our sleep – things like pain, anxiety, depression, stress, as well as increased frequency of urination (although Neil advises that getting up more than once a night is not a consequence of ageing and can be indicative of a problem, so it’s advisable to seek medical advice from your GP). “When you’re younger, you get up and go to the bathroom, go back to bed and you fall straight asleep,” says Neil. “When you’re in your fifties and older, you get back into bed and you don’t fall asleep straight away. You might lie there tossing and turning for around an hour or so because there’s reduced biological pressure to have more sleep, as well as lifestyle factors that could cause your mind to start whirring.”

Sleep problems are often a core symptom of peri- and post-menopausal women, who often tend to be around this age bracket. “In the years surrounding the menopause, women experience sleep disturbances with increased frequency,” says Neil. “They may find that hot flushes and night sweats cause repeated awakenings. Meanwhile, in the years following menopause, women’s sleep grows lighter and more fragmented. It becomes more difficult to maintain long hours of uninterrupted sleep and to remain awake during the day. Other physical factors can also disturb sleep: arthritis and other painful conditions, chronic lung disease, certain medications and heartburn.”
For more on how hormones affect sleep, see page 95.



YEARS 61-70

Sleep patterns can become easily disrupted

Dozing through the daytime. Waking in the early hours, unable to get back asleep. Getting up numerous times through the night. For many adults in this age bracket, sleep issues such as these can disrupt everyday life and leave them wondering if it’s just a normal part of getting older. At this age, the desire for sleep may occur noticeably earlier in the evening, with consequential early morning waking becoming an issue.

“The big problem we have is that we have this change in our ability to sleep, which is normal, but also we have other changes that are fixable, but people just accept them because they think that it’s just part of getting old. ‘I’m old, therefore I’m unable to feel awake and energetic today’, ‘I’m old, that’s why I snore.’ Some of these changes are fixable, and the important thing is to recognise these.”

To try and combat some of their issues with falling – and staying – asleep, it’s common for many couples of this age group to sleep in separate rooms. But this can result in concerns there’s an underlying problem in your relationship. “Sleeping separately says nothing about the quality of your relationship and is simply a solution to the problem of poor sleep,” Neil confirms.

The fundamental issue is that people aren’t giving themselves the opportunity to get the sleep that they require. “An enforced earlier bedtime when you’re not particularly tired doesn’t mean you’re getting the sleep you need,” says Neil.



YEARS 71+

Busting the myth that elderly people need less sleep

There’s a notion that the elderly require less sleep – but that may not necessarily be true. “This is one of the myths about sleep as we grow older,” says Neil. “Actually, while our sleep patterns may change over time, the need for sleep becomes fixed in early adulthood and does not greatly change. Essentially an 85-year-old needs the same amount of sleep they did when they were 25. What changes as we get older is the ability to get the sleep we need.”

“In addition to these changes are changes to our circadian rhythms whereby older people tend to become sleepier in the early evening, go to bed earlier and wake earlier in the morning.”

The lack of refreshment from sleep causes many older people to feel as if they’re suffering from more serious sleep problems, but actually much of what they feel could be accounted for by these natural changes. “The problem is compounded if the person also naps during the day as this may use up some of their need for sleep. This means they may sleep less at night, causing them to perhaps believe they have a problem,” says Neil. “If you’re not getting the benefit of restorative sleep at night, then any extra sleep you get is beneficial. The problem is it can become a catch-22 – if you nap during the day, you may get less sleep at night, which will cause you to nap during the day again. However, there’s no reason to suspect if you take away the nap during the day, that you’ll stick those two hours back into the night. By taking the nap away, you may be just deducting this amount of sleep!”

Neil advises cutting out naps for a couple of weeks to see if it benefits your night sleep. Otherwise, he says that napping during the day is nothing to worry about.



Illustration: Pascal Fossier/Getty Images

WHEN SHOULD YOU SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE?

Long-term sleep loss can have wide-ranging effects on your health, so there are times when you should see your GP

While most sleep problems can be sorted out by making changes to your lifestyle, such as adopting a relaxing routine in the evening or avoiding alcohol before bedtime, it's worth speaking to your GP about certain issues.

- If your sleeplessness is long-term, causing you to feel constantly tired or putting you in a low mood.
- If anxious thoughts prevent you getting to sleep, or stop you getting back to sleep if you wake in the early hours.

- If your partner often reports that you're snoring or even momentarily stopping breathing, and you wake up feeling tired. (These are signs of sleep apnoea, which is more common if you have a high body mass index.)

- Menopausal women can see their GP about managing the symptoms of the menopause or perimenopause.
- Men who have to wake frequently to use the bathroom should see their GP so that any prostate gland issues can be resolved.



Dr Neil Stanley is a freelance sleep expert with 37 years' experience, including time as the director of sleep research at the University of Surrey.

His book, *How To Sleep Well*, is published by Wiley.

www.thesleepconsultancy.com