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The Biology of Sleep

Sleep is an important part of life! Infants and toddlers spend at least half of their time asleep. We know how busy they are when they are awake, but what are they doing during all of those restful hours?

Actually, sleep has many purposes.

- **Growth:** Growth hormone is released when babies sleep (Berk 2002, 302). Doesn't it just seem like you can put a baby down for a nap and when they wake up, they look bigger? It could be. Babies and toddlers *are* growing in their sleep, and since they have a lot of growing to do, they need all the sleep they can get.

- **Restoration:** Some sleep researchers have found that sleep is important for letting the brain relax and restore some of the hormones and nutrients it needs (Jenni & O'Conner 1995, 205).

- **Memory:** Sleep is also a time when the brain is figuring out what experiences from the day are important to remember (Jenni & O'Conner 1995, 205).

- **Health:** A study found that infants and toddlers need at least 12 hours of sleep in a 24 hour day. When infants and toddlers had less than 12 hours they were more likely to be obese by the age of 3 (Taveras et. al. 2008, 305).

