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News

Health

Don't fear your child's afternoon nap

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A SHORT nap during the day seems to increase the overall amount of sleep a young child gets, rather than being a serious threat to night-time slumbers.

Babies and young children typically nap during the day, a habit that has been linked to the development of early memories. This trend usually stops between the ages of about 3 and 5, but the timing varies, leaving many parents unsure as to whether their child should nap or not.

In France, children start a form of preschool at 3 years old, which presents a dilemma of whether staff should let them nap. "Some parents and teachers are concerned that napping during the day might interfere with night-time sleep or reduce valuable learning time," says Stéphanie Mazza at the University of Lyon in France.

To see if naps meaningfully disrupt night-time sleep, Mazza and her colleagues gave wrist-worn sleep trackers to 85 children aged 2 to 5 from six French preschools and measured their sleep over an average of 7.8 days.

This data, combined with sleep diaries filled in by parents, revealed that an increase in nap

Many parents worry that a daytime snooze means less sleep at night

time of 1 hour was linked to getting 13.6 minutes less sleep at night, on average, and pushed back the time at which the child got to sleep at night by 6.4 minutes. On days when children napped, their overall sleep time across the day increased by 45 minutes (Research Square, doi.org/pwhh).

"Naps resulted in a significant increase in total daily sleep time, bringing children closer to the recommended international sleep duration for a 24-hour period," says Mazza. The World Health Organization recommends that children of this age should sleep for 10 to 13 hours per day.

"Parents shouldn't worry if their child still needs a nap before the age of 6," says Mazza. "Rather than viewing naps as disruptive, they should be recognised as a valuable source of rest, especially when children are exposed to stimulating environments."

"To me, this says – if they can nap, let them nap," says Rebecca Spencer at the University of Massachusetts, Amhurst. ■