

Naptime Dexterity

Category: Sleep

written by Jeffrey Seitzer | February 2, 2018

It's hard enough keeping most kids on a reasonable sleep schedule. When you throw a series of weekly, sometimes biweekly, outpatient surgeries into the mix, it's "Houston, we have a problem." A very big problem.

You arrive with your child at the hospital at 5:30 in the morning for preoperative consultation, and he goes under general anesthesia a couple hours later. A short surgical procedure is followed by a couple hours postoperative observation. Once home, he spends the remainder of the afternoon groggy and listless, mostly slumped in a kiddie Barco lounge, dozing on and off.

He begins waking up around dinner time, is perky and energetic in the evening, but unable to settle down to sleep until very late, waking up the following morning after only eight hours of sleep. Ironically, less sleep means he is revved up and going all day without a nap, which makes him irritable and frantic in the evening and unable to settle down to sleep at a reasonable hour.

After two days, he finally appears ready for a long nap that might help him ease into a normal sleep schedule. The problem is, he dozes briefly in the car on the way back from his preoperative physical for the next surgery and won't settle down for a decent nap after the appointment, which would help me remain calm in the evening, falling asleep on time.

The following day the cycle begins anew with another surgery. Repeat each phase of the irregular sleep experiment, just this time with even lower sleep reserves than before.

After suffering through this cycle a number of times, I discovered the magic of chocolate coins. I place a bag of them between the two front seats, where he could see them clearly. On the way home from the preoperative physical, he would ask for one right away. I tell him he can have one once we get to a stoplight. Each stoplight I fumble with the bag pretending I can't get them open. He wants them so badly that he does not fall asleep in the car. Once we are within striking distance of the house, I give him one as a reward.

We get home, where he has a decent nap. Helping him—and me—get back on a decent sleep schedule.

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