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SUMMARY

Dr. Chris Winter, a sleep specialist, discusses the complexities of sleep for both children and adults, emphasizing the importance of understanding individual sleep needs rather than adhering to rigid societal expectations. He advocates for a flexible approach to sleep practices, including co-sleeping and sleep training, while highlighting the significance of recognizing and addressing sleep disorders.

- Sleep needs vary significantly by age and individual; there is no one-size-fits-all solution.*
- Co-sleeping can be safe if done thoughtfully, but parents should be aware of potential risks, especially for infants.*
- Sleep training methods, including "crying it out," should be approached with sensitivity, distinguishing between different types of cries.*
- Journaling sleep patterns can help parents understand their child's sleep behavior and identify potential issues.*
- Napping is beneficial for children, but should be consistent and scheduled to support their circadian rhythms.*
- Circadian rhythms can be adjusted, but require cooperation from both parents and children.*
- Medication for sleep issues in children should be approached cautiously and only after consulting a specialist.*
- Parents should focus on creating a supportive sleep environment and be flexible in their expectations regarding sleep.*

[Music] hello and welcome to your parenting mojo podcast today we are going to talk about a topic that i know interests parents everywhere and that is sleep and so we've already covered this on the show from the perspective of looking at cross-cultural ideas about sleep but today we're here with an expert who is going to give us some practical ideas on how to get more sleep and so dr chris

winter is a board certified neurologist and a double board certified sleep specialist who's in private practice in charlottesville virginia he consults with athletes on improving their sleep and his first book the sleep solution why your sleep is broken and how to fix it was geared towards adults challenges with sleep and his new book just published in august is called the rested child why your tired wired and irritable child may have a sleep disorder and what to do about it so today we're going to

talk about sleep for children sleep for adults sleep for everybody welcome chris it's great to have you here thank you so much for having me it's an honor so um i would like to start by addressing the elephants in the room because i know that parents who are listening to this want to know your stance on these topics because they want to know is this person's approach aligned with things that i believe about sleep and about raising my children and

about my values and beliefs so bed sharing um i i will say that uh i found your approach in the book to be a little bit flippant and i'm yeah i'll quote you said we used to sleep piled on top of one another in a cave i suppose but we also used to banish people with leprosy and smoke cigarettes and operating rooms we evolve and that to me sort of implies that only backwards people in backwards countries

who haven't yet seen the light in the sort of western educated industrialized rich democratic approach to sleep they're they're just you know our approach is clearly superior and they're missing out on some important development um when actually i know the research has shown that uh people who live in those countries you ask them about their children's sleep problems and they're like what sleep problems so um so so tell me more about your uh stance on bed sharing and where that came from and

and what you believe about it sure so i think it's important to define evolve um because you're putting a judgment on it when in fact evolve just means take something that's simple and make it more complicated and we do that very well in this country i used to be able to fix my own car i cannot do that anymore because the cars have evolved to the point now where it doesn't allow that to happen so i do

think that sleep was very simple in the past and it's become very complicated um people did sleep in one room at some point in the past and now you have a nice house in gwinnett county you know atlanta and every one of your seven kids has their own bedroom in their own situation so i'm not here to pass judgment on anything my my stance on co-sleeping is you do what's right for your family and your children i don't really have an

opinion on it one way or the other outside of two things one i do think that it is important to be careful with little children when you sleep with them just out of a danger perspective and i don't think that's particularly radical although i do think it took a while for the american academy of pediatrics to really come out with a position on it just because of this kind of you know feelings about it it's deeply

personal to people the way they sleep so i personally believe that it's probably not a great idea to sleep in a bed with a child under the age of one just because you know i think that we have seen bad outcomes i've seen i think as of today thirty two thousand two hundred and thirty three people in my clinic four of them have had issues where children have perished in the night because a family member rolled on top of

them that's a very very very small percentage far less than what you know would be quoted for sids so to me if a parent understands that and it's very important to them to to take that risk i'm not really here to judge that i can say that of the people that we spoke to when that happened including a family member of somebody who works for me it was deeply traumatic and something that they never wanted to repeat again

i think that's different though than a family bed or co-sleeping i mean i think that's a very different situation the other bias that i have is that of those 32 000 people that have come to my clinic i have yet to encounter somebody who says i'm sleeping with all four of my children and it's going great i just wondered if you give me some tips on how to make it even better of people that we're seeing

are sort of the opposite it's like help us to make the situation that we've chosen which is to not have a child in bed with us more functional and better um so i i'm here to support anybody i think that the people who are co-sleeping and doing well with it um don't really have to see me or buy the book in fact yeah i know and i think co-sleeping can be really helpful because when you look

at some of the disorders of sleep that we talk about in the book there's sort of a mystery to the parent or parents that aren't with their children until they share the hotel room until they go to grandmother's house and share a bed because grandma only has one spare bedroom where they're like dear god my child does this thing at night we had no idea so you know even if you're somebody who believes not you're not in co-sleeping

it might not be a bad idea once a month to kind of check in like we're all sleeping together to make sure we're not harboring bad sleep problems and um so anyway i think and then the only other thing i would say that again there's a selection bias here too is that when kids come to have sleep studies a parent we make a parent accompany them and so our sleep center's in a hotel so it's very comfortable

the key the child has a bed and the parent has a bed in this hotel truly it's a hilton hotel um it's amazing how many times the parent is the one diagnosed with the sleep problem the tech will say the kid's okay dad you know suffocating 38 times an hour kind of thing so i do sometimes wonder if you know if you're going to co-sleep it might be a good idea to make sure your sleep is really healthy and and positive

before you subject your child to it but that's that's a small percentage probably yeah okay cool well thanks for clarifying that and um i i guess my my stance on code sleeping has always been uh i i don't believe it's curly sleeping itself it's necessarily dangerous it's co-sleeping in the way that we tend to do it in this country uh on a soft on a soft bed with duvets and pillows and and above the the level of the floor so pla

the child could potentially roll off the bed it there there is some potential danger of rolling onto the child but my hypothesis based on the research that i have read is that um that that the danger of that happening is is much less than the danger of the child suffocating from a pillow or from uh getting a duvet on them or rolling off the bed or something else happening that's based on the practices that we use when we sleep

and if we didn't use those practices if we use practices that are more like the practices used where people do co-sleep routinely then chances are it would be much much less dangerous do you agree with that perspective yeah that's probably very true um you know a lot of the things that we talk about in terms of having bumpers and cribs and soft pillows and stuffed animals you know really having a hard surface and a simple surface and you

know just and creating things that make you as the parent comfortable and we co-slept with our kids they were just in a little bassinet kind of like you described next to our bed just because i not interested in sleeping on the floor even though it might be better and i know from experience that you know my wife would sometimes say it's truly disturbing how deep deeply you sleep sometimes because you know she's been screaming for 30

minutes and you haven't moved um to the point where when i was in residency my wife would not let me be at home with the kids while i was sleeping unless i was sleeping literally on the floor as you said in the nursery away from them so they could like throw stuff out of the nursery onto my head to wake me up just because i was i i was always even just kind of on a couch which is the worst place

you're sitting there watching tv and you kind of drift off with them on your stomach like i was always very paranoid about that absolutely yeah yeah um yeah but i would agree with everything you said okay i can fully empathize with your wife too no i mean she really feels like i mean i shouldn't announce this but if people came into the house unannounced at night i would be no help in terms of dealing with the situation i'm not sure

what she thinks i could do in that situation but it might be better to sleep through it i don't know i'm not sure about that maybe and then you do sort of casually toss out this idea that if we start out co-sleeping then children are going to refuse to sleep on their own later and you you have this little foot now this is sweetie can you take your laptop somewhere else to do your calculus homework daddy and i need to sleep um

and and i have this this statistic that quotes a paper that uh research suggests co-sleeping children slept fewer hours had more sleep disturbances and bedtime resistance more behavioral and emotional problems than independent sleepers but that study involved school-aged children and also found that the anxiety and nighttime fears predicted co-sleeping rather than the co-sleeping was generating anxiety and fears um so it seemed as to me as though it was unlikely that the co-sleeping was going to cause behavioral emotional problems

which is what i understood when i was reading that in your book what do you think about that i don't think it causes it again it's just a matter of what does the parent want and most parents are probably not letting those it's sort of like i don't know i remember having a conversation with my parents when they said you're too old for a blanket i have no idea why they chose that particular tuesday to just take it away

from me my guess is at some point i would have not been that interested in the blanket we never told our kids stop we call them booze okay no more booze because you're this particular age so again i think the footnote was more in line with at some point parents are like we don't want to let this sort of play out naturally i have no doubt in my mind that it always does i mean i've never met a

family he said he's 17 he's still in the bed with us and you know we really are just losing our patience so to me that's more about at some point most co-sleeping families that are coming to see us have decided we're done with it it's affecting our intimacy we want to have some time by ourselves at the end of the night that don't involve the kids in bed with us i had an nba player that had two children in bed

one went to bed every three third or fourth night and he was like this is affecting my career because i'm having to get up and change you know sheets every night my wife is like that's okay because this is what we're going to do so again i these are probably true it's just i think it's hard to find some parents with the courage to let it play out um they they kind of want their their their lives back and

and to your point that's a big problem when it comes to sleep i mean most one of my mentors said you know most kids sleep problems or parents sleep problems and it's an expectation that we have of our kid that's not meeting our needs i've got a lot of work to do and i'm falling behind and watching episodes of white lotus so i got to get this kid in her bed so i can do what i need to do

if your expectation is yeah they can be in bed with me they might sleep they might not everything even adult sleep gets better so a lot of what we're managing is now that's why you said what is your stance on sleep training i love that term as if we're doing like the parents that didn't train their kids to sleep and now they can't you know i mean it's not swimming for god's sakes like they're going to sleep they may they may

sleep differently than what you would expect or on a different schedule but the idea that we're training them no we're just kind of guiding some little parameters here and there you know so it's interesting the way we think about these things kids are good sleepers and good eaters and good breathers and good drinkers like we just kind of need to step back and let it happen and be on the lookout for problems in those areas but our dominion over the situation i

think is a lot less than what we think it is yeah and and i i want to sort of translate what you're saying into language that i think will be familiar to people who are long-time listeners of the show we're really talking about needs here and if the parent's need is being met and the child's need is being met by whatever situation you're sleeping in then you really don't have a sleep problem even if it's right or any or any problem

i don't want to stay out late well we don't want you to stay out late there we don't have a problem you know what i mean like you're absolutely right and that balance is important but i think it should always bend towards the child you know in my opinion i mean not to the point where you're hurting relationships and upsetting people but you know sometimes a child's needs are just they supersede that and if if you don't like that

that's okay maybe children aren't your thing that's that's fine that's okay yeah okay all right so you touched on sleep training um and so uh specifically on the method of crying it out where you train a child to stop calling out in the night by not going into your room and i was really pleased to hear you distinguish between what you called a gentle weep and that hysterical hyperventilating screen with purple face and bulging forehead vein that happens

when a kid's really hurt or upset because i think it is really important to distinguish between those two things and and maybe parents who are expecting or they have a newborn they're they're still learning how to do that um and and may not yet realize that there actually are many different kinds of cries and you can distinguish between them and so you say trust your instincts you are going to know when to intervene but then in the very next sentence you said you

need to pick a time interval but you'll wait before going back into the room to console the child and so i'm just trying to figure out how do those two things fit together in terms of what we're actually doing when a child is having trouble getting to sleep well to me it's sort of that again that set point that even if the child was just kind

of gently weeping or calling out you know or something that i wanted to have some

sort of guideline in my mind i mean again i'll go in every 30 seconds if we need to do that so to me it's just kind of a matter of you know he's in a place where he's okay but he's kind of upset we've got that feeling of it's not that hyperventilation or he's thrown up in his bed and his face down in it and could i push it another 20 seconds just to kind of stretch that out a little bit

but sometimes you can't so to me it's just more of a not only a guideline of what to do but a guideline hopefully that allows a parent to say you know what we started this we were we we couldn't even start the clock before because he was so upset by the time we walked out and now he's routinely going probably 10 or 20 minutes before that happens it doesn't sound like much but it's there and i just think that

when the kid is little and and those things are kind of being being done again there's that expectation if you're kind of like i have no nothing no nothing planned tonight it's like there was a great mad about you episode that they kind of did that helen hunt paul riser it was all shot in one take and they were kind of sitting outside waiting for her to make those little sounds and they were kind of talking it was just a

really cute little episode um but i think when you kind of have set it up that we're gonna have a night where we're just going in and out of this bedroom and you know maybe we could answer an email or plan out something for something you know but but this is what we're going to do i think things go much better so you know it's just a it's a rough guideline i wouldn't say well he's screaming but we still have 45 seconds

left no i think you should go in there and do it and and the more you do it up front the probably the quicker it's going to happen because you're going to understand that you're always there um you're never far away and you know and again if somebody says i don't really want to do that i'd rather just have the baby in bed with me and never even experience this purple bulging vein thing again that's fine if

that's that's what you need and and that's what you want that's that's great you may never hear it you know but i just i remember those days very clearly if it would kind of start off with this kind of like you're like and sometimes it would go away and that would be that yeah and other times it would just kind of build and and yeah i think it's better actually to intercept early because when they get really upset and

wound up that can interfere with sleep just the anxiety and cortisol of all that situation can make it harder on yourself so probably better just to jump in there early yeah and and i think the really the key part is is having expectations that are aligned with what your child can actually do some some children are going to go to sleep by themselves in their room fine and other children are not going to be able to do that and if your

expectation is that your child will be able to do that and your child actually isn't capable of doing that then those misaligned expectations are going to set you up for a whole world of pain yeah and just and i mean i i was talking about that at a lecture recently i mean one of my worst parenting moments was that situation i my

second child was born when i was in residency and i was just i was not in a healthy place and not

getting enough sleep and i was like oh you go do something i'll take care of him we're just going to take a nap together and he was in his bass and it's safe i'm not going to roll onto him and he just was not going to sleep and i remember getting home when my wife got home i said he's an idiot they're just i just and we looked at each other and i was like i can't believe i just said that

about our child these poor little six month old or whatever but i just think that again it was just such a terrible misalignment of what i needed and what i expected you know and versus what he could actually do he wasn't doing anything wrong he's not an idiot he just wasn't ready to sleep in that moment for whatever reason and and that that problem is a parent problem not a child problem yeah for sure okay cool well thank you for clarifying that

and i think that those people who are listening and watching can kind of exhale and and say okay yes i'm i'm on board with this and now i can relax into the rest of this now that i i see something outlined here so thank you for that um so let's let's start to go through some of the main ideas in the book and and you talk about the amount of sleep that people need at different ages and how this varies um and i think

the the way that we often think about it isn't terribly helpful so um what would you tell us about the uh the amount of sleep that we need at different ages and and what should we understand about that yeah i think that western medicine doesn't do a great job of differentiating you from an average you know we that's kind of what we learn okay the average person has a gallbladder underneath their liver on this side of their body well there's

people have their liver on their other side of their body doesn't make them wrong or right just a little bit different so if you always if you think 100 of people have their liver on that other body you're going to make a big mistake at some point coming up so you know i think that with with sleep we do that very poorly and i think it comes from the fact that we have a lot of interest in sleep

but the magazine only has about 350 words for that article so what's so great about podcasts and i would just back behind the scenes of your viewers like we were having some back and forth in the emails i don't know if i want to have you on my show because i'm concerned about your and i was like this is so great like she's got an opinion we're going to get into this like it's not just you're great and you've got two

board certifications which is kind of a joke but that's not a funny one but anyway there's more on that in the book yeah so but but you know so the challenging of certain things and sharing and ideas is what makes a podcast so great versus you know a writer who writes up and god knows they're just doing their job how much sleep should a kid get and you can tell they don't really want to talk about i just need you to tell me

real quick so i can write this little 350 word thing for this magazine to write for which is nothing wrong with that but i often find myself sort of incapable of answering a question so sleep needs a tough one because number

one it's changing all the time even in us and if you look at like the national sleep foundations you know chart on sleep average you see from the time they're born until you're you know senior citizen

getting the early bird special at the cafeteria it's like this constant reduction in sleep and there's a lot of debate is that normal what accounts for that you know what what makes that happen you know we know growth hormone is secreted primarily in deep sleep deep sleep is sort of that driver of the diminishment we have about the same light sleep and rem sleep as we go through our life but that deep sleep is diminishing and it

makes kids grow it makes us healthy it's probably a big reason why we age as we get older but in addition if you just look at one particular age category the infants are the one that fascinate me because there can be an eight-hour difference between my child of that age group and yours which is why parents should never talk to other parents who have children like it should be not allowed like you're not allowed to compare your sleep or ever talk about

that it's like talking about your kids s.a.t score you would never do that with another parent why would you talk about their sleep you know so those things are so individualized and what starts to happen is that we start to worry when we have children on that shorter end because of everything you've just said it's expectation my expectation is that the ryan reynolds blake lively book on sleeping kids their kid is beautiful sleeps 14 hours a night so i'm going to

set my schedule up to make my child sleep 14 hours and it doesn't work because nobody ever asks the question but does my child specifically need that and we do a good job of talking about that i think maybe with food i've never seen an article that says how many calories would you be eating because i think there's an insinuation that what do you do well i'm a long-distance runner and i'm five foot one or i'm a

bodybuilder and i'm six six or i'm a senior citizen and i'm a 18 year old like so those caloric needs can change radically depending on circumstances and genetics but we don't seem to want to talk about that with sleep it's always just give me a number eight hours we gotta get eight hours well that's great if you're in that normal distribution but if you're on those tails that's that's a real problem so i think that you know understanding how

can we look at our individual child or children and figure out what is their individual needs for sleep and know that once you've got it figured out now in a couple years it's going to change so just be ready and and and understand that but it's not hard if you kind of come to it with sense of openness and questioning and there's a lot of cool technology that you know again i'm i'm plus minus about technology too but

there are some cool things out there that can allow a parent to be pretty scientific about figuring out how much sleep their kid needs so then once you've got that number you can kind of construct the schedule that works best for you and your family that also meets the needs of the children so like you said that equality what i need what the child eats kind of meets perfectly yeah okay so we're going to talk about how

you get to that number in a little bit firstly i just want to acknowledge uh something i learned from this during the research for this episode which is around nine percent of individuals may sleep less than fewer than six hours a night um although that was based on some survey data that had sort of methodological challenges but but approximately um and and they were only looking at adults as well not children so um so i think that we

we don't necessarily allow for the fact that our child might be one of those people and in both of your books i think you talk about uh how this can be hereditary yeah absolutely it's one of my favorite things to ask parents because not only in terms of duration i don't want to jump ahead but not only in terms of duration but timing preferences which is a big thing too and it's so fascinating to say you know

what did your parents your biological parents do for a living or what do they do and you know we see a lot of uh mom's a trauma surgeon and that is you know something in the military or a lawyer or something and you're like okay well i bet trauma surgeons don't sleep a whole lot and maybe your daughter has kind of fallen on that side of things and so it's really interesting and there's nothing wrong or right about

it it can have some real advantages now if your daughter wants to be a trauma surgeon like mom was a trauma surgeon she might have an advantage there in terms of it's not an intelligence thing it's just can you deal with being you know i i didn't want anything to do with that but i'm glad somebody does and that might give her a sense of being able to do that better but it does come some downsides as well

too especially if you're reading books say you better get eight or nine hours of sleep or you'll develop dementia or heart disease it can put people and especially kids under a strange pressure to deliver something they're not really capable of doing yeah yeah and i think that also coming from that pressure is this uh the sleep identity that you talk about where we we adults we parents project these ideas of our child being a bad sleeper onto them and so often we

see in so many aspects of behavior that you you think of your child as being the bad child or the the difficult child and they fulfill that prophecy so i was really interested to see the same concept come up in the idea of sleep well i was interested in your i mean just in terms of your background i find it interesting the way we describe our children that there's certain things that are sort of off limits that i i've never

heard a parent say oh come down here teddy teddy's our dumb child dude i mean like even if teddy struggles you would never describe him in that in fact there's often a a an effort to accentuate the things that teddy teddy's a great communicator um you know he just can't do complex math or whatever it is like but it's interesting to me how sleep seems to be something that parents are almost describing like hair color

this is our child he's blonde this child has got darker more wavy hair bad sleeper good sleeper almost as if you're just describing a trait well there's no judgment there he's a bad sleeper where you know the way kids internalize that is so important and i see adults too just to let your viewers know that and it's really fascinating to see all ages related to sleeps i just see sleep patients in my clinic and how many older people will talk

about how bad they've slept for so long you know i've always been a bad sleeper it's kind of the thing and it's always interesting to ask what have what has led you to that met that determination you know i'm a bad basketball player and if you ask me why i'm short and i don't handle the ball i can give you very objective things that i doubt you'd be able to argue me out of that assessment but the sleep thing is it's fascinating

sometimes where those things come from that have no real grounding anything particularly real um and if you and based upon the things that you do i'm sure the way we view ourselves like that identity can sometimes be more impactful to our day-to-day functionality than the sleep itself like and i always divide people into good sleepers you know the way they think about their sleep good and bad but the way they really are good or bad so you can have

people who are really good sleepers who know they are they're impossible the people who are terrible sleepers who know they're terrible but then you also have terrible sleepers that think they're great you know the trauma surge as long as i get two hours i'm fine no you're not that's not a true state like you're gonna die at 52 if you don't do something and then you've also got people who are terrible sleepers who are actually pretty good there's nothing

wrong with it but they believe that and it really is pretty damaging yeah okay um and so i think um it seems as though one uh one under utilized tool in understanding children's sleep is is really accurate journaling right and instead of just uh thinking oh my kid's a bad sleeper because they woke up again and you talk in the book about how uh we're sort of our minds are predisposed to remember the one time this week that they did

wake up uh rather than the three other times that they didn't wake up um and and that journaling can actually be really helpful to understand what's really going on instead of just the the parts that really stick out to us because we didn't want them to happen yeah they're important not only for the parent but also for the child do you know what i mean like to so so that you're sort of putting a stop to

their oh i'm just so bad well look you know if you compare to january you had seven nights out of that month where you really struggled this month and last month it's only been two and three that's a huge improvement you know so always kind of be encouraging or it's going the wrong direction in which case at some point you might decide well we might need a little bit of help here because we think there might be

something going on so i think that the journaling is very important and you know we you talked about selection bias earlier which is you know sleep research tends to be kind of fraught with it doesn't mean you can't get a lot of cool information about we always want to look at with that eye but that selection bias is always important in terms of you know if i have one bad night in a month i'll not mention it at the dinner party house

you were sleeping i've been sleeping great this month you know maybe if my wife were there well you slept pretty badly last week that tuesday when something happened oh yeah i guess you're right so it can work both ways too that you know i often feel like my bias is oh i get eight hours of sleep every night my sleep's great and my wife is like laughing in the back she's not here right now so i can say whatever i want

to say about my sleep but you know sometimes that technology or the journal is wonderful to kind of say you know what what i'm thinking is being the exception is kind of becoming my rule i need to be smarter about that and i think that's important for older kids you know yes you're going to have a soccer game or a test or a choir rehearsal or a you know volunteering at some soup kitchen or something we want to make sure those are

exceptional nights and not becoming a more normal night yeah okay um and how does napping relate to all of this should we nap how should we not should children nap houston children now yeah and i love talking about napping napping probably is sort of like we're deviating outside of i think of everything in terms of evidence as a spectrum i'm pretty sure plants use chlorophyll to make oxygen make oxygen from carbon dioxide i'm not sure about these things over here

napping i i'm pretty certain that that it's a good thing i think we have to be careful now i'm talking about napping in older kids and little kids i think it's essential um you know and in terms of when they drop their naps and how you structure that i've got ideas you know for people who are trying to figure that out but there's no real right or wrong way to do it i do think naps that are consistent

are better meaning that it's something that the child can predict versus we're just going to try to fit an hour long nap in at some point now that might be the case when your schedule doesn't allow for it but i think if you could choose chris which would you rather us do a nap whenever we want to or a nap at a scheduled time it's probably better scheduled i mean meal times being scheduled some exercise time and nocturnal sleep at night we

just know that those sort of zeit givers really help to influence a child's circadian rhythm and we can extrapolate from research as they get older people who don't really develop that or have jobs that are pushing them outside of a consistent circadian rhythm i work seven eight to seven p in the emergency room then flip over to seven p seven eight two weeks later might be a carcinogen i mean our bodies don't like not understanding what's coming yeah um

outside of that i think that napping is also an important tool for when a child has had inadequate sleep there's been a research recent research study that says napping is inadequate to make up for sleep deprivation i thought the interpretation that study was a little bit skewed in the sense that yes if you're truly really sleep depriving yourself a 20-minute nap may not fully make up for the situation that you've created for yourself but to me it's kind of like if you're

starving and you come across a cracker should you eat it the research would probably say this does not make up for the starvation i'd say probably eat the cracker because maybe you'll find another one in a few minutes like you know to me like take what you can get so to me sometimes i think about napping in terms of we want to be careful about napping when a child or an adult is inefficient with sleep meaning that

you know an adult says it could be four hours to fall asleep last night so i woke up went to work came home and took a four-hour nap i think that could facilitate a problem not going away now your body's kind of understanding that we're kind of all over the place with it so to me napping can be a wonderful way to make up

for for lost sleep i mean i think it's it's perfectly adequate to look at

sort of sleep debt data and say my child needs not so much 10 hours a day but maybe 70 hours a week so if you know you go stay at grandma's house and she's got weird hours and something screws up your sleep and you get home the child had a bad night of sleep grandma had friends over so she didn't get two of her naps that you have the next six days to kind of maybe tweak

some things extend the naps to maybe make up for that sleep loss that really wasn't your fault i think napping is very important in that way for kids and adults to kind of keep track taps on you know sleep debt because we're we're not going to have a perfect night of sleep every night it's not going to happen yeah okay and then of course that begs the inevitable question uh what happens when the child resists napping and you can see that

they're so tired and they just don't want to do it yeah yeah and that's a really important concept of the fact that children manifest sleep very differently than adults do you know one of the reasons i called the book the rested child was because i don't think we talk about rest and meditation and relaxation and quiet time enough it's sort of we judge success or failure in bed by speed of unconsciousness like that's the only thing that's good you know what i

mean and and so i i think that that if a child is resisting napping there's a lot of questions to answer number one is he always or she always resisting it meaning that it's time to drop the third nap because you know three percent of the time she's she's utilizing it's 97 she's not um so i think that's important because i think those little things often give us a little window into oh i think that things might be evolving

you know she was a 16 hour kid maybe she's more of a 15 hour kid now i think that's number one number two i don't mind a child resisting a nap i think the dialogue we want to have with the child is it's okay not to sleep like we never talked about sleep being something that had to happen with our children in fact we tried to avoid the topic altogether and you know why don't you just read a book

or draw me a picture because we saw that cool fire truck why don't you see if you can draw how much you can draw from memory so we always kind of couched it as rest time or quiet time and then we would say if you fall asleep that's fine but if you don't you're still doing something really wonderful for your body and you're giving everybody a chance just to kind of be still and be quiet just for a little bit because that helps

me to be a better parent for you it helps us to be more healthy so trying to de-stress that beginning and give a child a little bit of freedom if they can understand it to to not sleep that's that's perfectly okay you know and so in fact we would often say that you know i can't sleep i don't i don't want you to why don't you just read a comic book all night and maybe you could write an essay about it when

you're a parent when you have to write a paragraph for yourself you could write your paragraph about what's like to stay up all night reading comic books and remember kids would be like really like you know you don't

care like no i don't really now we'll wake you up and you know we'll go about our day but we really try to create a sense of there's no pressure here in fact you could not sleep if you tried like that's not

something that you really find in nature so it's not complicated by a lot of performance anxiety yeah you know i don't want to lie to a kid that it's not important so it's that parenting mojo of i need to make sure you understand sleep is important and money is important and school is important but it's not some sort of crisis if that thing if you get a c on a pace okay like it doesn't matter like so where can you find that

balance of value sleep but understand it doesn't always work perfectly that's a tough thing for everybody and myself included to kind of figure out you know yeah and and i i really believe that the earlier that starts the better we all are and we have practiced what we call no set bedtime uh since my daughter was probably three um really oh yeah yeah she she does not have a setback time we read stories at eight o'clock and we brush her teeth

right after that and then she decides her in bed time she tells us when she's tired um and she is we're home schooling right now so she doesn't have a set wait time but she was in in daycare and preschool for a long time and yeah there was a period of time where she would go to bed at 10 o'clock 10 30. and you know you're sure you're not tired and and that lasted a few days and

within a week or two she's self-regulating her in bedtime i think that's awesome yeah and and so i i was i was pleased to read in in your book we started around six or seven and i thought we were radical with that so that's amazing but i think that's exactly what should happen it was a great study one time the kids were taken into a cafeteria with every kind of food you know available to them including desserts you know for the

first three days they just ate cake and then they kind of regulated themselves so i think we don't give kids credit for doing it and just having that sort of situation of oh your body knows what to do yeah yeah that's so interesting that you bring up that the food issue because there's so much research on uh they call it uh making the the vegetables the gateway food you have to eat the vegetables as the gateway food

to get to the dessert that you really want and so of course if if we're saying you have to go to bed now what does the child want more than anything the child wants to stay up and so if you just take that away you just we talk a lot on the show about dropping the rope you're going to drop your end of the rope and the child there's nothing to pull on they can pull their

other end but there's nothing to pull against and so it's like okay you want to stay up that's fine and yes you want to see me answer emails you can sit right there and watch me do it until i go to bed if you like it is interesting it's a very i don't know if it was i don't know what your three-year-old was like but for a six-year-old it was a fun conversation like it was just

you can have all the candy you want we're we've got a truck pulling up right now it's full of candy and we're

going to dump it in a room and you just get whatever it was that kind of yeah we're going to have christmas every day because it's so much fun like it was just that kind of like are you kidding me like they just have this look like this is great like this is the and then

it just kind of takes the whole and i bet there's a lot of things that we could do with our kids that would remove those kinds of of mystiques and and weirdness that develops around it because we create it yeah yeah and and i think the the important part is that yes you're you're removing the staying up as being the holy grail of the thing that i want to do because you don't want me to do it um

and what you're also doing is you're you're not just saying well okay then you can have free for all in the house um we we are saying is i have needs to and i have a need for quiet time and here are some ways i can think of to meet my need for quiet time and you can meet your need as long as i can also meet my needs so it's nice and the conversations like you said starting

with a three-year-old but how important sleep is and how sleep reaches into so much about what you do things that a three-year-old could easily understand that those are not mutually exclusive i'm just giving i mean i think lunch is important you may not be hungry for your sandwich right now don't eat it i don't care yeah i still think eating is important and eating the right foods so you can have those two conversations in a way that are

not mutually exclusive we're just giving you the freedom and the space to recognize sleep when it's time for you to get it in a healthy way versus eleven o'clock nine o'clock seven o'clock what i mean the number of adults that come to me who say i takes me two hours to fall asleep my first question is why have you decided x is your bedtime and they have no answer to it probably because that foundational piece of

learning how to sleep was never discussed it was just dad told me i needed to go to bed at this time and if he caught me in bed with the flashlight in a book i'd get in trouble so i guess i go to bed at this time all the time and i've never never questioned it even when your body is saying i don't want to go to bed at nine o'clock it's taking me hear what i'm saying eleven's

much better for us like they don't it doesn't resonate because i don't think they've ever had that conversation or that freedom to kind of choose that which is yeah a huge weight off a child yeah okay so i i mean obviously i know because i've read the book but uh we can sort of tell where we're going with this conversation medication for children and and having sleep problems my guess is you're going to say not ever without talking to a sleep

specialist first um what would you advise yeah children are not sleeping as much as they think they their child yes i mean i don't use a lot of sleep aids i don't think they make a lot of sense not not only just fundamentally but if you actually look at the research it's extremely you'd wonder how does this drug ever get approved for that because there's nothing here and so and more than that you're having this beautiful conversation with your

three-year-old there is a an assumed conversation with a melatonin gummy bear which is your brain is just not

good at sleeping so i'm going to give you something to make you good at it and i no i'm not really fit now if your child has narcolepsy if your child has restless leg syndrome your child has nocturnal reflux or asthma of course because we've created a diagnosis here

that might have a medication that could improve that the problem we often have with using pills to make people sleep is that there's never been a diagnosis established okay well maybe your child doesn't sleep or can't sleep without a pill what is what is what's the name of that disorder i'd like to know maybe i need to know about i'm i'm in a constant state of learning i hope it never stops you know maybe i can learn something

here but more often than not there's not been any kind of diagnosis it's again that expectation when i'm observing they're not matching up so i'm going to try to crowbar my child into something that works better for me i've never had a child ask for a sleep aid you know what i'm saying like it just they're just kind of sitting there kind of trying to get the phone out of their mom's purse like that's what they're

interested in at that point they're not you got to help me doc i'm really i'm not learning my consonants and valves because i'm not getting enough sleep so i need so it's just unfortunate that we have so little understanding of these things and and um and that fear and anxiety that parents feel um kind of gets washed out in terms of something oh here just give them this um medical i'm not very medically inclined yeah and and i i was struck by

the statistic was in your book uh where you say that 20 of pediatricians have ever had any training in regarding the perspective or i think i mean it's almost a quarter and even the ones that have it's like a couple hours i mean i got i went to emory medical school and i was doing sleep research when i was an undergrad but in my four years of medical school we just got an hour-long lecture right and when you look at adults it's two of

the top seven complaints of that all patients bring to their doctor is can't sleep and i'm tired or fatigued and there's pain and some other things or whatever so it's interesting that in four years you get an hour for that so i remember thinking wow i guess that's not something you maybe see a lot and that's all you see so it's really unfair that we're not arming people with that knowledge and so that was a big reason why i wrote the

book i felt like let's just go to the parents they know more anyway and so let's just inform them and let them be the advocate you know and if your doctor kind of pushes back or gets upset because you know more about sleep than he does then go find another doctor yeah and you don't know a lot about a lot of things and if your doctor isn't not aware of that maybe find another doctor yes um and i think that the

critically important part of that quote was actually the second half of the statistic we we talked about you know like a fifth to a quarter of pediatricians have had any training regarding prescribing sleeping pills and yet 66 percent routinely prescribed them so clearly there is no absolutely i mean they've got seven minutes to spend with your kid to keep the lights on in the clinic we you and i could talk about sleep a long time i imagine and sometimes

the parent and the sleep doctor need to talk a lot i don't know your child yet i know the average and i've seen some outliers in my career but i've never met your child before so it's all about understanding and history and collecting good data and journals and and and me listening and not me telling you what to do because the average child does this and so if you don't have time to commit to it that's okay i don't fault pediatricians

for the time piece i fault them for taking it on and not just being like oh you just need to go see chris or whomever you're not just yeah there's much better sleep doctors where you live than i am but it's just let's just that's what they want to do that's what they're sitting there waiting to do so let's let the baby delivering doctors deliver the babies and the surgeons take out the tumors and the sleep doctors

deal with the sleep problems and and i think everybody be a whole lot happier yeah okay all right so you've mentioned what a circadian rhythm is but we didn't we didn't really define it um so i wonder if you can help us to understand what a circadian rhythm is and then uh whether it's possible to shift those because i hear all the time from parents you know my circadian rhythm is this and my child's circadian rhythm is this and

the two are not well aligned what can we do about this so circadian rhythm is essentially something in our brain that is a time keeper so if you think about a heart a heart as a rhythm a menstrual cycle has a rhythm our bodies have lots of rhythms i say all the time a brain never does anything accidentally like there's you know whether we can see the rhythm or not is different and with sleep it does provide a little

window into that circadian rhythm so what i always want people to understand is that circadian rhythm is not just related to sleep it's related to the blood cell production in your marrow it's related to uh hormone release and digestive peptides and whether your left nostril is congested versus your right there's even a circadian i mean everything has got a little pattern to it body temperature's a big one but the sleep's interesting because we see it you know we can say oh you know mom is a

real night owl and dad likes to go to bed at seven o'clock and if you can see that or um if you're sitting up at night you know i'm sitting there my underwear my wife's like freezing because her she's a morning person i'm a night out so her body temperature's dropped a little earlier than mine has you know if i'm staying up late cramming for an exam at two in the morning that's when i start to get cold so there's the drop so

there's little ways you can see it and it's really important because sleep is a great measure of that circadian rhythm so everybody tends to be in about the same range but there are people who just are more morning oriented in that that temperature drop might happen early that's usually how you measure circadian rhythms in a study you get a little you know thermometer somewhere that's not terribly pleasant and you get it every 15 minutes and you can track it

out and now everybody's got thermometers with coven you can do it just take the low thermometer and read your thing and write it down and 15 minutes later do it again and the whole family can do it for a science fair project and you can actually see that undulation we tend to sort of peak around four in the afternoon and trough about an hour before we wake up so it's important to understand those things because they govern things like

when is your kid going to do best on a spelling test when is he going to be athletically at his peak when is he going to feel better and if you're homeschooling there's a lot of real positives that my wife's a teacher both my parents are school teachers i think about once every six months during our child years we would be like we're homeschooling forget it we're doing it and and there'd be so many advantages to

that because then you could allow your child to have that bedtime when he wants to and the wake-up time when he wants to that's you could create consistency it's just consistent over here so the question you ask can you change this or circadian rhythm you can you're not really changing the rhythm so much as you're you're changing sort of the positioning on it meaning as soon as you stop rowing the current starts to take you back and

anybody who's a night owl you know some guys in my neighborhood sometimes would get up and work out in the summertime so i'd be a nice day i'm gonna get up and work out with them and as soon as the winter time comes i stop i go right back to wanting to sleep later you know so so then the question becomes what should you do and i you know i think the answer would probably be oh you should homeschool

your kids um and you know well i'm not going to do that or i can't do that or i don't think that's the right thing for our family okay so can we get your school to make some adjustments i know we can't do that either okay so you've got your night owl son is going to have to take you know ap calculus first period because there's no other option you can't get at the community college couldn't take it online

there are things you can do the problem is it requires a lot of a kid um i mean if you had told me when i was a college student uh chris you should probably go to bed at this time every day and get up and exercise and see some sunlight eat breakfast i mean i would have just thought you were crazy i have a memory from college of like coming home from something at six a.m and seeing some these i remember these

two guys got up they were in fitness gear and they were going to the gym and i thought they were insane i was like what are they doing why would you even come to college if you're just going to get up at 6 a.m and go work out then you realize you get older oh yeah they had they were correct you were really messing yourself up like so to me you can do it but you've really got to

have a bit of a participation of that child and i find that again you want to talk about mismanagement of expectation of parent and expectation on child really crashing it can be around some of these circadian disorders and just like we were talking about sleep need it runs in families you know so if you're a night owl and your partner's a night owl just you might have a kid that's a real night owl and so if you're homeschooling that

can be easy everybody gets to wake up or or cove it for some night owl families this has been i always hate to say cove has been a blessing that's terrible but that scheduled relaxation of we don't have to get up for the bus he doesn't have early board early bird jazz his first class is at 10 o'clock on the computer and he's making straight a's now and then we don't have to get up to get

him out the door like we have you know so there's different things for everybody but you can do it um it's just hard it's really hard yeah and and you describe the process in the book and i read the rested child first and and frankly the process isn't that pretty it involves a lot of kind of uh making your child do things that are not particularly pleasant to get them to stay awake so that they will you can you

can figure out actually how much time do they really need to sleep and then figuring out what their wake time it has to be to get to ap calc or whatever's going on in their lives and then they can go to bed uh before you then set a number of hours before that and that i have to say the whole thing sounded incredibly mean-spirited to me until i read your first book uh in the sleep solution

where you're essentially describing doing the same thing for for adults who want to shift their circadian rhythm um and so so the method is there but but with what you're saying about as soon as you stop the training as it were you're going to be swimming against the current i guess then my my question becomes well what happens if your kid is a night owl or or the opposite actually you're the night owl and your kid is a four o'clock

in the morning kind of person and yes you can train them but do you want to be training your child for the rest of your life um do you just suck it up for a few years until they can learn to stay in bed i mean it seems as though essentially that's what you're saying right probably the thing you know hopefully as time passes those sort of extremes do soften i would say yeah this is not a i'm

deviating outside of science would say this to like my opinion would be yeah you'd probably if you're i mean i'm a real night owl fortunately my wife is not so it's a wonderful balance um but i do think yeah there's a certain degree of suck it up or my clinic starts at this time in the morning i don't start my clinic at noon so at some point i think it was around medical school it was kind of like

oh you don't have to show up you can sleep till noon if you want to we're just going to kick you out so you know at some point the motivation got there um but i don't know that it's necessarily the healthiest situation for me to be in um you know this is definitely against my tendency but so yeah i think that if you were the night owl and your kid were the morning person yeah or maybe you create a situation

where you know you take turns with your partner or something where you could kind of make it such that it's not so bad um but again i think that getting the amount of sleep you need probably trumps that um as long as things are consistent and there's lots of people who've kind of made their lives a little better but it is interesting to follow people's careers because i do think that there's a lot of magazine writers who are night owls

computer programmers or night owls they gravitate towards jobs that facilitate that i always say to people all the time my wife had been a much better doctor than i am but her need for more sleep and an earlier schedule she became a teacher and i don't think that's entirely accidental you know and that's and i think a lot of us saw really great people get weeded out of the process that we're super smart but they just

like i don't want to do i don't have the horsepower for that which is probably they probably added years to their lives by doing that yeah okay so and and what about night wakings then uh if if we're finding that as parents to be really detrimental to our ability and you you talk in in your first book about uh that it is not good for us to have these short periods of chopped up sleep and and you cited your own sleep as a

resident um as an example of that so if we're essentially getting resident quality sleep because our kids are waking up that's funny that's right yeah no i mean i think that's probably the biggest red flag in terms of sleep now understanding that if you watch your child like on a baby monitor you're going to see that they awaken quite a bit you know wake up move around go right back to sleep so we i think humans wake up about 30 times in

average a night on average little arousals now if you ask them how was your night they should say it was fine i didn't wake up at all which is not entirely true if you've got some little leads on their head yeah and kids can be really all over the place with that kind of thing they wake up and reach for things that aren't there and sit up and you know i remember another doctor saying don't ever allow a parent to watch their child

sleep because they do so many weird things that are kind of normal they're not necessarily pathological i should say um but i do think that if you're feeling like my child's irritable there are a lot of awakenings when they're coming into the bedroom with us or even not like we just hear them awake in their bedroom a lot messing around they don't bother us but we do feel like there's a lot of disruption to their sleep their bed's a mess in the morning

and everything's torn up and they're turned around they're sleeping on the floor you know i think when you have those sort of indications that this doesn't seem like a really calm peaceful night those are things to maybe bring up with the doctor especially if they're associated with um you know bedwetting that's that disappeared for a while and came back um low growth that's falling off a curve you know they were always 80th percentile now they're kind of dropping

off of that behavior and irritability that's new for older kids you know behaviors at school school performance problems like mattel's always done well and seems to be struggling suddenly again nothing wrong with struggling maybe the classes are just getting harder but i think that you always want to pay attention to that because in my experience really really good parents do a pretty good job of ignoring that sometimes i don't know i'm bad at it i i ignore

stuff wrong with my car i was like why stop how long has the car been making that sound like i don't know not too long you know i think it's going to work itself out you know never works itself out right um you know so i think that we don't want to ignore those things away but i think parents are going to have a good reason to ignore it because they might bring it up with somebody like a doctor and then

they just get kind of dismissed yeah particularly oh well that's okay kids wet the bed goodbye you know well my kid's 14 now you know and he's still wetting the well they're gonna grow out of it like i just feel like a lot of

times and it probably is coming from a place of i don't know what to do so i can either tell you i don't know what to do and i'm not sure about that

i could send you somewhere or i could just dismiss you and unfortunately uh choice c sometimes is the answer so don't feel that way you know if you feel like something's going on with your your kid i always tell people the worst thing that can happen is you get a sleep study that's normal you know what i mean like okay that's great i love a normal ekg even at my age like normally kg all right that's great you know

i thought i felt something there but maybe it was just the pork sandwich or something i'm so excited about that like normal studies are great um or they're not um so yeah the fragmented sleep something to pay attention to and that's not just a kid wanting to come in and get a get another hug or sleep in bed with you again that's your choice but if you're feeling like we can't get past the awakening awakening waking all through the night

let's let's start digging a little deeper okay all right and then as we wrap up then uh for for parents who are on the newer end of parenthood maybe maybe they uh they're pregnant they're expecting uh they have a newborn they're like how do we get this started on the right foot and i know there's not going to be one recipe for this because every every child is going to have different needs but what advice would you give to

somebody who is very new to this process and who wants to get started in the best possible way that we can for an individual child i think education is great i mean both of my books and it's awesome that you read both i just just again for your viewers to understand that they probably get this from listening to you we haven't been communicating that long and she's already gotten a hold of both of my books and clearly read them which

i just think is i don't think my own mother's read both my books that's really really amazing of you but you know i think that education is important so both of my books i wanted to start off with at least some idea about how sleep works because it's amazing up some ideas people have about it so that's where i would start off with understand that your child is going to be completely unique so it's fine to

have sort of a sense of well my best friend's daughter this is the schedule that she used and it worked really well for her or they really like this how to get your kid to sleep to the night book and i've been reading that too um i think that one of the things that i find really interesting about that the prenatal period is that if you're on a schedule you know you're going to the gym at the same time every day and have

a little bit of a quiet time every day then that could influence your child's rhythm once they're born i mean the only input they're getting right now is sort of sounds and movement from you and so i think the more structured you can make your life with this amazing baby growing inside of you probably the better your your child will be no that's not to say that if your life's all over the place you can't reign it in in some way but

i would also just be you know be confident because there's not a lot of things you can do to really wreck it you know i mean if you're coming at it from a really good place you know again that what method are you going to

use for sleep training i don't know my husband wants to do cried out and i think that's terrible like just again common sense that nobody wants their child and they're screaming and wailing and turning like to you so

you're just comfort give your child love put your child's needs up there with your own don't have a lot of expectations initially like i think those first few months would just kind of survive it like i don't have great advice for that i call it gorilla sleep like oh god the kid fell asleep you know let's go take a nap like you know like you just kind of get through it but just have a plan and

understand that the plan's not going to work right off the bat but you know i remember like our child's little nursery we had a little light box on the table and even when the child woke up at five and we wanted the child to wake up at six you know you go in there because they're kind of fussing and you sit with them and you're quiet you don't get too crazy with them and then at six a.m we

would open up the windows and change the diaper and turn on the light box right next to the child's head and you know play and put on some bob seeger because my first child loved bob sega that really a little night move suits her right now you know so whatever like so there was this big state change at six o'clock dark to light fasted to fed dirty diaper clean diaper dark light and they got the situ they got it down

pretty quickly i don't think it's because we were doing anything particularly exceptional and we just had a plan and when the plan worked that was great when it didn't you make some adjustments but you're going to do fine i'm jealous of the new parent for sure it's so much fun it's the problems seem easier they seem insurmountable now but then when they get older they do they do but they're just kind of they're problems that have less sort of

consequence and yeah you're tired and you feel afraid and you tell your kid he's an idiot but it's it's wonderful and it will work out and if it's not there's lots of people around that can help you out promise about that okay super well thank you so much uh for approaching me and asking to come on the show and for bearing with me because when you said that i wasn't sure i wanted to have you on the show you weren't joking

[Laughter] and you were very game about allowing me to kind of poke a little bit about some of the things that you said in the book and so i'm very grateful that you would allow me to do that um and uh yeah i i really enjoyed reading both books and i am implementing some of the ideas from the sleep solution uh your first book for adults so um i'm excited about that for me as well so good good i think it's

so great i'm gonna talk about you from now on because every whenever i say when our kids turned six or seven we told them there's no bedtime there's always like the audience is like a scandal i'm like are you kidding me i know somebody who started at three like basic language and they're like you no sleep like whenever you're like well i don't know i even convey that to it i love that good night moon we're gonna

read good night moon whenever you want to good night the stories still happen on schedule because that meets my needs right so it's not it's not a free-for-all but uh so anyone who wants to read chris's books can find uh

references to both of them uh the rested child is the the most recent one and then the the sleep solution is the one that's geared towards adults all of that can be found at your parentingmojo.com forward slash

rested child [Music]