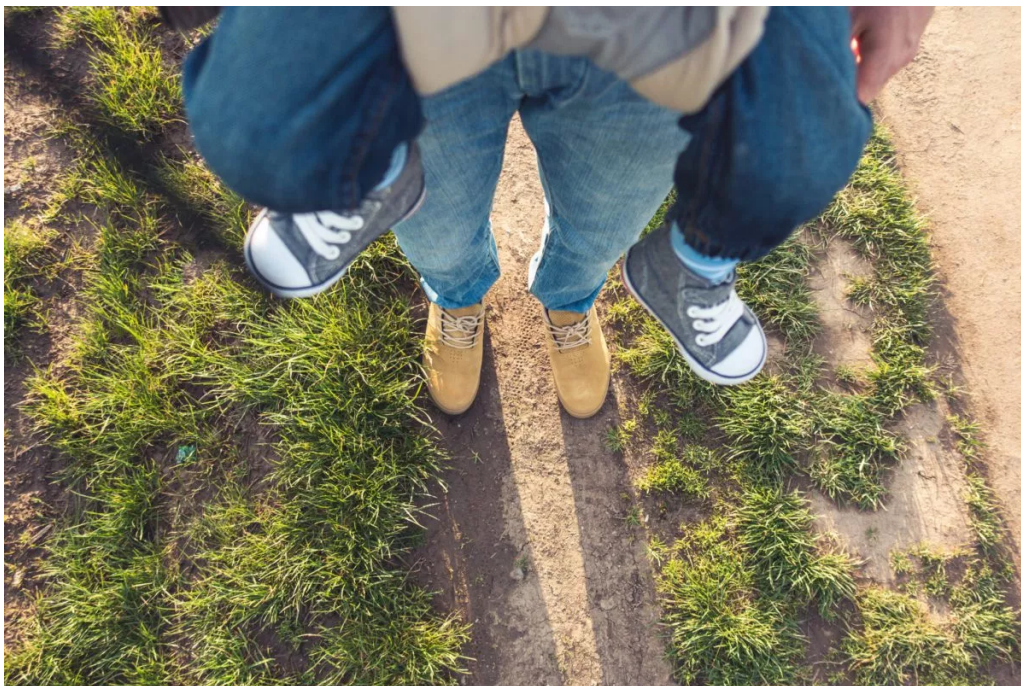


RAISING KIDS

How to Prevent a Parental Disaster During Your Afternoon Witching Hour

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We have all suffered through our children's witching hour around dinner time (typically between the hours of 4 p.m. and 6 p.m.)...the tantrums, the whining, the arguing. But have you ever stepped back to notice that parents have our own witching hour around 2 p.m.? If we don't take some precautions, things could get pretty frightening at home.

Several studies point out how it may be harder for us to think clearly, make good decisions, and avoid making mistakes during the middle of the afternoon. This is due to our circadian rhythm, a 24-hour internal clock that helps regulate hormones in our brain to cause us to feel either sleepy or energetic. That circadian slump time is widely referenced in the business world, but it also affects stay-at-home-parents trying to take care of their kids.

A new study in The Journal of Neuroscience by researchers at Australia's Swinburne University of Technology went one step further and discovered that our brain's reward system also goes haywire around 2 p.m. Essentially, this system is responsible for helping us evaluate potential risks versus rewards to make an effective decision.

The study found that rewards we receive in the morning or evening tend to come as more of a surprise than rewards we get in the afternoon. That surprise factor causes certain parts of the brain to light up more. This means that we are better off skipping certain activities during our own witching hour.

Want to avoid overreacting and saying something to your kids you will regret later? Try these tips for making the best of your witching hour:

Eat a healthy snack

Like our kids, if we go too long on an empty stomach, we are bound to lose our balance. Your best bet is to choose a snack that combines protein, fiber, and complex carbohydrates to raise your blood sugar levels steadily and keep them up. This will give you a boost and help improve your mental performance and decision-making ability.

Schedule nap time for both you and your child

Feeling drowsy in the mid-afternoon is totally natural, according to neuro specialist [Dr. Fiona Kerr](#). She explains that humans are physically designed to take two naps per day, although very few of us actually do so.

Our hormones ebb and flow throughout the day, typically dropping around 2 p.m. During this period, we have reduced attention capacity, executive function, working memory, quantification skills, logical reasoning, motor dexterity, and mood. Experts recommend taking a power nap for about 15 to 20 minutes to recharge.

Talk a walk outside

Another way to beat the 2 p.m. slump is to head outside for a walk. Put your little one in a stroller or baby carrier and take a walk around your neighborhood or at a local park.

This will get your muscles moving and oxygen flowing. Breathing in the fresh air and soaking up some nature will reinvigorate you and reduce your stress. Being out in natural sunlight can also help reset your internal clock and give you a much-needed energy boost.

Do some light exercise and stretching

Experts also recommend doing some light exercise and stretching to get through the slump. Try doing some yoga poses with your kids, or put on some fun music and have a family dance party.

Alternatively, tap into technology for a movement break, using programs like [Go Noodle](#). More than 60,000 elementary schools in the United States are using this creative online program to give their students active breaks throughout the school day. Why not use it at home for both you and your kids?

Plan a calm activity

If you sense your mood heading for a dip, be sure to plan a calm activity for your kids so you can have some down time. Send them to their room or another comfy spot to do some reading or coloring on their own. Or maybe take this opportunity to afford them some screen time.

Accept your limitations

When all else fails, plan ahead to get help. Hire a babysitter, invite a grandparent over, or work out a system with a friend or neighbor who will watch your kids for a couple hours. You can do the same for them another day.



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