

Sleep and Your Child

Good Sleep Habits Start Early



Helping Your Child Develop Healthy Sleep Habits

Sleep is a vital need, essential to a child's health and growth. Sleep promotes alertness, memory and performance. Children who get enough sleep are more likely to function better and are less prone to behavioral problems and moodiness. That is why it is important for parents to start early and help their child develop good sleeping habits.

Each child is different and has different sleep needs. This chart suggests recommended hours of sleep that includes naps for children up to 12 years of age. Adolescents need about 9.25 hours of sleep.

HOW MUCH SLEEP SHOULD MY CHILD GET?

Age	Hours of Sleep
0 – 2 months	10.5 – 18
2 – 12 months	14 – 15
1 year – 3 years	12 – 14
3 – 5 years	11 – 13
5 – 12 years	10 – 11

typical bedtime routine

- Have a light snack
- Take a bath
- Put on pajamas
- Brush teeth
- Read a story
- Make sure the room is quiet and at a comfortable temperature
- Put your child to bed
- Say good night and leave

Helpful Hints

- Make bedtime the same time every night.
- Make bedtime a positive and relaxing experience without TV or videos. According to one recent study, TV viewing prior to bed can lead to difficulty falling and staying asleep.
- Save your child's favorite relaxing, non-stimulating activities until last and have them occur in the child's bedroom.
- Keep the bedtime environment (e.g., light, temperature) the same all night long.
- Encourage children to fall asleep on their own. A child should not need a parent to help him/her fall asleep. A child who falls asleep on his/her own will be better able to return to sleep during normal nighttime awakenings and sleep throughout the night.
- Discourage nighttime awakenings. When you go to your child's room every time he/she wakes during the night, you are strengthening the connection between you and sleep for your child. Even babies who are held and cuddled when they wake in the middle of the night soon learn to expect this and do not learn to go back to sleep on their own. Except when the child is sick, has been injured or clearly requires assistance, it is important to give your child a consistent message that he/she is expected to fall asleep on his/her own.

Common Sleep Issues With Children

Nightmares often occur at times of transition, stress or a change in the child's routine. They usually occur later in the night and are remembered the next day. Fortunately, nightmares tend to go away naturally. Encouraging your child to talk about the nightmare, discussing comforting images before bedtime and avoiding television immediately before bedtime are strategies that assist in alleviating nightmares.

Sleep Terrors/Sleep Walking occur most frequently from ages 4 to 8. These sleep disruptions occur during the early part of the night. The child is actually asleep during this time and often has no memory of the event the next day. Waking or comforting the child is usually not helpful as it prolongs the event. Be sure both your child's room and your house are safe. Most importantly, encourage your child to get enough sleep.

Sleep Apnea is a serious disorder in which there are pauses in breathing during sleep. Children with sleep apnea may snore loudly, experience restless sleep and be sleepy during the day. Enlarged tonsils or adenoids, allergies, weight problems and other medical issues may contribute to the sleep apnea. There are many ways to treat apnea, so it is important to see a doctor or sleep specialist for diagnosis and treatment.

Narcolepsy is often first noticed in puberty, but may occur as early as 10 years of age. Children with narcolepsy experience excessive daytime sleepiness and uncontrollable "sleep attacks," even when they get enough sleep. Children with narcolepsy should be diagnosed by a doctor.

In conclusion, studies show that 37% of children in grades K-4 suffer from at least one sleep-related problem. If your child is very sleepy during the day, experiences any of the sleep issues above or has trouble falling asleep independently, be sure to consult with your child's physician or with a sleep specialist. If your adolescent has trouble falling asleep or waking up for school, a sleep specialist can also assist.

sleep myths and facts

MYTH #1

Put children to sleep on their stomachs

FACT: Babies should sleep on their backs. According to the "Back to Sleep" program, this lowers the risk of dying from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). The American Academy of Pediatrics also recommends that parents should avoid placing young children to sleep on a water bed, sofa, pillow, soft mattress or other soft surfaces.

MYTH #2

Parents should wait until a child is fully asleep before putting a child to bed.

FACT: Children should be put to sleep when they are drowsy, but still awake. This helps children learn to fall asleep independently.

MYTH #3

Children will sleep longer at night if they do not take a nap.

FACT: For young children, nap and nighttime sleep are both necessary and independent of each other. Children who nap well are usually less cranky and sleep better at night. Although children differ, after 6 months of age, naps of ½ to 2 hours in duration are expected and are generally discontinued between the ages of 2 and 5. Daytime sleepiness or the need for a nap after this age should be investigated further.



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