

CHILD SLEEP

Tips and techniques to help your child sleep

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5 benefits of sleep



ACADEMIC

A review of over 35,000 studies on child sleep found that sufficient sleep helps to improve school performance, decision making, problem solving, planning and multi tasking!

Teaching children about sleep has also been found to increase the time spent asleep as well as academic grades.



IMPACT ON MOOD

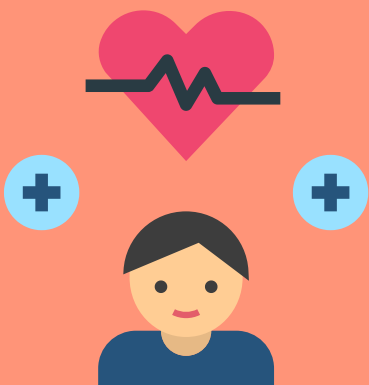
Disrupted or poor sleep has been found to increase hyperactivity, disruptive behaviours, emotional difficulties, and increased difficulties with social interactions. Therefore a good night's sleep can help child behaviour, mood and friendships.



ATTENTION AND MEMORY

During REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, our brains store information we have learnt that day which helps us to retain and remember information.

A study found children who slept for longer scored higher on tests, were able to remember more information, and react quicker than the children who slept for less time each night.



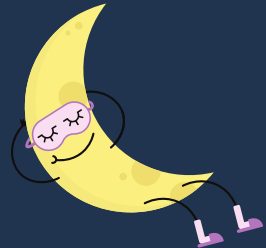
PHYSICAL HEALTH

Adequate sleep has been found to help fight infection, reduce the risk of injury, reduce risk taking behaviours and help to prevent weight gain.



HAPPIER FAMILY

Consistent bedtime routines have been found to improve child sleep, reduce parental/carer fatigue, and reduce anger and stress in parents.



HOW MUCH SLEEP SHOULD MY CHILD BE GETTING?

It is often difficult to know how much sleep your child should be getting and research suggests that many parents are unsure. Therefore we have compiled a chart below of the NHS's sleep duration recommendations.

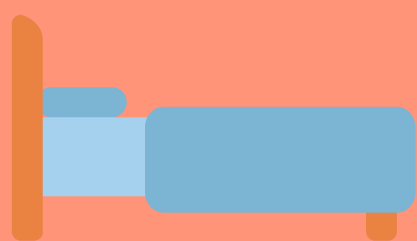
Child's age	Recommended sleep duration
2 years	1 hour 30 daytime 11 hours 30 nighttime
3 years	45 minutes daytime 11 hours 30 nighttime
4 years	11 hours 30 minutes
5 years	11 hours
6 years	10 hours 45 minutes
7 years	10 hours 30 minutes
8 years	10 hours 15 minutes
9 years	10 hours
10 years	9 hours 45 minutes
11 years	9 hours 30 minutes
12/13 years	9 hours 15 minutes
14/15/16 years	9 hours



WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD SLEEP

The following strategies are all recommended to support children's sleep and bedtime routines

BEDTIMES

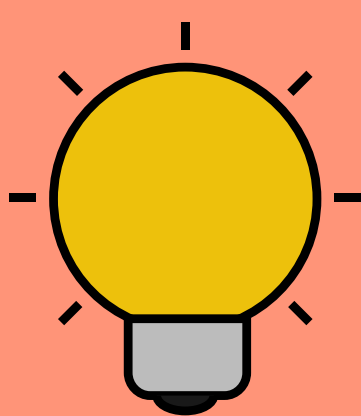


Try to keep your child's sleep and wake times consistent throughout the week. A shift in bedtimes at the weekend can largely impact children's circadian rhythms (similar to jet lag) and can make it more difficult to fall asleep. Consistent sleep and wake times have been linked to improved concentration, focus, and ability to fall asleep.



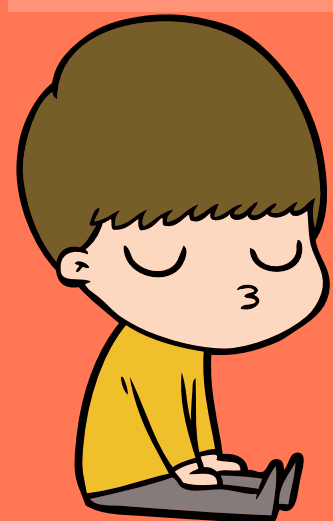
LIMITING CAFFEINE

Try to limit food and drink that contain caffeine in the evenings. These include chocolate, fizzy drinks, energy drinks, tea and coffee. Consuming caffeine at night has been linked to morning tiredness, restless and reduced sleep, and more sleep problems in children.



EXPOSURE TO LIGHT & TECHNOLOGY

Blue light which is found in light bulbs, TV screens, tablets and phones, suppresses melatonin (the sleep hormone) which makes us feel tired. Try to reduce screen time at least one hour before bed as blue light has been found to make us less alert, and reduces time spent in REM sleep (the time where we process information).



CALM TIME

Try to create a routine that your child associates with bedtime. Dimming the lights, removing screens from the bedroom, having a relaxing bath, and story time can all help your child wind down before bed. Having a routine in place will help your child to learn that is it time to go to sleep.



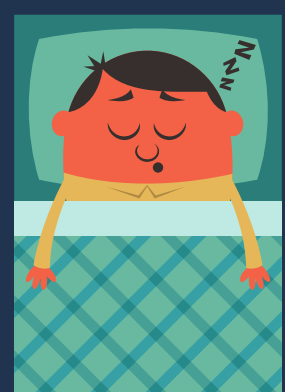
TEMPERATURE

To fall asleep our bodies need to decrease in temperature by 1 degrees celcius, which explains why it is easier to fall asleep in a room that is too cold over too hot. A decrease in body temperature sends a message to the part of the brain that releases melatonin. Having a bath or washing hands/feet with warm water before bed, helps to lower our **core body temperature** which releases melatonin and makes us feel sleepy.

WORRIES



One of the main triggers stopping people from falling asleep is worries and anxiety. Talking to your child about their fears or worries can help you to support them. Maybe your child could draw a picture about their worries, or they could tell their thoughts to 'worry dolls' before going to sleep. Talking to your child can help you to understand what is stopping your child from falling asleep and help them process and manage their worries. If your child is scared of the dark there are stories that can be read at bedtime to help.



SUPPORTING INDEPENDENT SLEEP

Helping your child to self-soothe and fall asleep on their own can reduce night awakenings, and improve parent/carer sleep and wellbeing

We sleep in cycles which usually last for 90 minutes. At the end of a sleep cycle we become partially awake (this happens between 4-6 times a night in young children). We then fall back asleep into another cycle. However, children who have developed a sleep association, where they require help to fall asleep (e.g. lying next to a family member, having the TV on, or falling asleep on the sofa) find it difficult to return to sleep themselves. This often leads to children crying out for comfort in the night.



SLEEP ASSOCIATIONS


Many children require a sleep association to fall asleep such as being held, listening to music, or lying next to a parent. However, these often aren't available when a child wakes which prevents them from falling asleep on their own. Sleep experts recommend that sleep associations do not involve adults, to allow the child to self-soothe independently. A toy, blanket or item of clothing can be introduced over time to support the child in falling asleep on their own.



GRADUAL WITHDRAWAL FROM THE BEDROOM


If your child falls asleep with you in their room, they often need you there to return to sleep. Gradual withdrawal means slowly increasing the distance between you and your child as they fall asleep. This could start with you sitting on the bed, and over time slowly moving towards the door. If your child becomes upset just go back a step and avoid engaging in a conversation if possible. Over time your child will learn to fall asleep on their own.

REWARD SYSTEM

A large, bright yellow star with a smaller yellow star above it and two small yellow stars to the left, all set against a dark blue background.

A reward system can be used to encourage and reinforce good sleep practice, which could include your child staying in their own bed or not visiting your bedroom in the night. It is important that the reward will motivate your child, so it could be useful to design the reward system together. Once a reward has been achieved it should not be taken away for negative behaviours. It is important that your child knows the reward was achieved and earned to help keep them motivated by the reward system.

NAPS

A cartoon illustration of a child napping on a yellow sofa. The child is wearing a red shirt and blue pants. There is a teddy bear and a yellow blanket on the sofa. A yellow bag and a water bottle are on the floor next to the sofa.

If your child naps in the day try and keep it at a consistent length and time of day to support their circadian rhythm. If your child (4 years+) naps in the day and is having trouble falling asleep at night, they may be sleeping too much in the day. Therefore, you may want to reduce the nap time slowly, for example reducing the nap time by 5 minutes each week until it is cut out altogether, to see if this helps your child to fall asleep at bedtime.

SUMMARY



Children's sleep can be impacted by many factors- pain or discomfort, noise, worries, sleep associations, stimulants, temperature and many more. Therefore, try to consider what may be causing your child's sleep difficulty to be able to support them effectively.

A bedtime routine and good sleep hygiene (avoiding caffeine and screens at night, consistent bedtimes, calm time etc.) are hugely important in helping your child's sleep. Being consistent and explaining boundaries around sleep and bedtimes is key!

Children pick up on parent and carer anxieties so try to keep calm and positive around bedtimes.

It takes children time to learn a new behaviour. Try and be consistent as a family to reinforce and teach good sleep behaviours. Children may push against boundaries at first so it is important that you are consistent with routines.

If you would like more information on sleep you may find the organisations below useful:

- **The sleep council**- Practical advice and support to help with sleep
- **The Children's Sleep Charity**. - A national charity supporting child sleep issues.
- **Cerebra**- a charity for children with brain conditions that offers a sleep advice service.