



HELPING YOU AND YOUR CHILD GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Sleep is important for many reasons, including:

- Overall health and being a healthy weight; (children who don't get enough sleep are at higher risk for sickness and being overweight).
- Mood; (not getting enough sleep can lead to irritability, crankiness, etc.)
- Learning, memory and concentration; (it's hard to think right if you are tired!)
- Behavior; (not getting enough sleep can lead to poor attention and hyperactivity)

How much sleep does your child need?

- Some people need more sleep than others. The amount is different for everyone and depends on age. Older children need less than younger. Children from 1-10 years may need anywhere from 10-14 hours.
- You can tell that your child is getting the right amount of sleep if they:
 - Fall asleep within 15 to 30 minutes.
 - Wake up easily and don't need you to keep bugging them to get up.
 - Wake up refreshed and, for children who do not nap, are awake/alert all day.
- Signs that your child may not be getting enough sleep:
 - They fall asleep most of the time when riding in the car.
 - You have to wake your child up almost every morning
 - Your child seems overtired, cranky, irritable, aggressive, over-emotional, hyperactive, and/or has trouble thinking during the day.
 - Some nights, your child "crashes" much earlier than their usual bedtime.

Other information that is important to know about sleep:

- It is normal to wake up in the middle of the night but it is easier to fall back to sleep in the middle of the night the same way that you fall asleep at bedtime.
- Co-sleeping may help you and your child sleep or may cause more problems. For example, you may bother each other when you awaken in the middle of the night.
- Children with anxiety, autism spectrum disorders, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder or neuromotor problems are more likely to have sleep problems.
- It is not uncommon for children to sleepwalk or wet the bed but they both may interfere with sleep. Both usually are outgrown by adolescence, if not before.

What can you do to help your child sleep well?

- Provide an adequate amount of regular physical activity during the day.
- Give them a healthy, balanced diet that does not include caffeine, especially in the afternoon or evening. Do not let them eat or drink too much just before bed.
- Keep a regular bed time; it is best to have your child go to bed and wake up the same time every day, even on weekends.
- Have a calming bedtime routine, like reading a story or cuddling. The bedtime routine may last anywhere from 10-30 minutes.

- It might help to use a visual/picture schedule to help your child transition and to know what is to happen at bedtime.
- It is best not to let your child watch television or do other things, like wrestling, that may wind them up for at least an hour or two before bed.
- Be firm about having your child stay in bed at bedtime; have rules about no drinks, kisses, etc. after lights out. If your child gets out of bed, promptly return them to bed and let them know in simple terms that it is time for them to stay in bed and go to sleep. Using a reward system may be helpful for this.
- Let your child fall asleep by him or herself.
- Provide something like a blanket or stuffed animal that is comforting.
- Keep your child's room dark and quiet. There should be no TV, computer games, etc. A white noise machine may be helpful to reduce outside noises.
- Don't give your child anything but water to drink in the middle of the night.
- Be patient and consistent and your hard work will pay off.

Medical problems that might affect sleep:

- Snoring that is loud
- Sleep apnea or pauses in breathing
- Very restless sleep or restless leg syndrome
- Tooth grinding or clenching
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease
- Constipation or gas
- Coughing related to allergies or asthma
- Seizures
- Spasticity

What might your primary healthcare provider suggest?

- Treat an underlying medical problem, like constipation or reflux, or see a specialist for treatment of a medical problem, like an ENT physician for snoring.
- Use medication such as melatonin or something else to help your child fall asleep more easily and stay asleep. Medication may only be needed until your child learns better sleep habits. It will work best when used in combination with the tips listed above.
- Work with a psychologist on behavior management.
- Have your child seen in a clinic that specializes in childhood sleep disorders.

Books that might be helpful:

- Take Charge of Your Child's Sleep: The All-In-One Resource for Solving Sleep Problems in Kids and Teens, by Judy Owens and Jodi Mindell.
A comprehensive guide to kids' and teens' sleep issues.
- Solve your Child's Sleep Problems, by Richard Ferber.
A practical, easy-to-understand guide to common problems for children ages one to six. Detailed case histories on a wide variety of problems and their solutions.

This publication was developed with funds from Special Medical Services primarily for use in its specialty clinics, such as the Neuromotor and Child Development Clinics. For more information on sleep or other issues, contact your child's primary healthcare provider or your child's coordinator at Child Health Services (603-606-5456) or Special Medical Services (1-800-852-3345 ext. 4488 or 603-271-4488).