

HEALTHY SLEEP HABITS



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Sleep is very important for everyone. All children require a certain amount of sleep each day to ensure proper mental and physical development. During sleep, the body releases natural growth hormones that children need for growth, learning and memory.

A poor night of sleep or inadequate total sleep time can lead to health problems in children, such as poor school performance and lower grades, decreased alertness and concentration, increased mood and behavioral problems, and headaches. Children with epilepsy are also more susceptible to seizures when they are sleep-deprived.

How much sleep does my child need?

Every child is different and research has not determined an exact amount of sleep required for each age group. However, the chart below offers a good “rule of thumb”. In general, children are encouraged to get as much sleep as possible, especially during their early childhood years.

Age	Hours of Sleep Required per day
Newborns (1-2 months)	10.5-18 hours (in periods of 2-4 hours)
Infants (3-11 months)	14-15 hours (4-6 hours per night and 1-4 naps per day)
Toddlers (1-3 years)	12-14 hours (including 1-2 naps per day)
Preschoolers (3-5 years)	11-13 hours
School age (5-12 years)	10-11 hours
Teens (11-17 years)	8.5-9.25 hours
Adults	7-9 hours

Ways to improve your child's sleep:

- Enforce consistent a consistent sleep and wake schedule, even on weekends and holidays
- Encourage periods of play and activity during the day and avoid these activities in the evening close to bedtime.
- Limit the number of naps for children over the age of 6 years old.
- Avoid caffeine. This includes caffeinated sodas, teas, coffee and even chocolates.

- Avoid drinking excessive fluids or eating large meals close to bedtime. Finish eating 2-3 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid bright light exposure during the evening hours. Turn off electronics at least 1 hour prior to bedtime. This includes TVs, video games, cell phones and laptop screens.
- Avoid letting your child spend time laying or playing in their bed unless it is at naptime or bedtime.
- Make the bedroom a sleep-only zone. Remove all toys, games, televisions, computers, radios or anything your child finds distracting or entertaining that could keep them from sleeping.
- Create a comfortable sleep environment. Some children have strong preferences towards, or against, stuffed animals, blankets, night lights and music or white noise makers.
- Develop a regular bedtime routine. This may include a nightly bath, story time, and brushing your child's teeth. The important part is to keep it at the same time and in the same order each night.
- Avoid sleeping with your older child. This habit makes it difficult for them to fall asleep when you are not present.
- Put your child in bed when they are tired or drowsy, do not wait until they are asleep. This helps your child learn to fall asleep by themselves and enables them to put themselves back to sleep if they wake in the middle of the night.
- If your child does regularly wake at night, wait a few minutes before responding to them. This encourages them to self-soothe and possibly fall back to sleep on their own without a parent's presence. Obviously, do not ignore your child if they are upset or distressed.

If these above techniques and tips do not improve your child's sleep you should speak to your healthcare provider about a medical evaluation. Your provider may also recommend supplements or medications that may help improve their sleep. Do not give your child sleep aids unless told to do so by your medical provider. If your child is taking something for sleep be sure to mention it to your medical provider as certain medications and supplements can have harmful interactions.

References and Resources

- <http://kidshealth.org/parent/growth/sleep/sleep.html>
- <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/sleep-topics/children-and-sleep>
- <http://www.sleepforkids.org/html/sheet.html>

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