

Healthy Sleep Tips for Children and Youth

The body rests during sleep; however, the brain remains active, gets "recharged," and still controls many body functions including breathing. During **Non-Rapid Eye Movement (NREM)** or "quiet" sleep blood supply to the muscles is increased, energy is restored, tissue growth and repair occur, and important hormones are released for growth and development. During **Rapid Eye Movement (REM)** or "active" sleep our brains are active and dreaming occurs. Our bodies become immobile, breathing and heart rates are irregular.

Sleep and Toddlers (1-3 years)

Toddlers need about 12-14 hours of sleep in a 24-hour period. When they reach about 18 months of age their naptimes will decrease to once a day lasting about one to three hours. Naps should not occur too close to bedtime as they may delay sleep at night. Many toddlers experience sleep problems including resisting going to bed and nighttime awakenings. Nighttime fears and nightmares are also common.

Many factors can lead to sleep problems. Toddlers' drive for independence and an increase in their motor, cognitive and social abilities can interfere with sleep. In addition, their ability to get out of bed, separation anxiety, the need for autonomy and the development of the child's imagination can lead to sleep problems. Daytime sleepiness and behavior problems may signal poor sleep or a sleep problem.

Sleep Tips for Toddlers:

- Maintain a daily sleep schedule and consistent bedtime routine.
- Make the bedroom environment the same every night and throughout the night.
- Set limits that are consistent, communicated and enforced. Encourage use of a security object such as a blanket or stuffed animal.

Sleep and Preschoolers (3-5 years)

Preschoolers typically sleep 11-13 hours each night and most do not nap after five years of age. As with toddlers, difficulty falling asleep and waking up during the night are common. With further development of imagination, preschoolers commonly experience nighttime fears and nightmares. In addition, sleepwalking and sleep terrors peak during preschool years.

Sleep Tips for Preschoolers:

- Maintain a regular and consistent sleep schedule.
- Have a relaxing bedtime routine that ends in the room where the child sleeps.
- Child should sleep in the same sleeping environment every night, in a room that is cool, quiet and dark – and without a TV or other electronic devices such as computer or video games.

Sleep and School-aged Children (5-12 years)

Children aged five to 12 need 10-11 hours of sleep. At the same time, there is an increasing demand on their time from school (e.g., homework), sports and other extracurricular and social activities. In addition, school-aged children become more interested in TV, computers, the media and Internet as well as caffeine products – all of which can lead to difficulty falling asleep, nightmares and disruptions to their sleep. In particular, watching TV close to bedtime has been associated with bedtime resistance, difficulty falling asleep, anxiety around sleep and sleeping fewer hours. Sleep problems and disorders are prevalent at this age. Poor or inadequate sleep can lead to mood swings, behavioral problems such as hyperactivity and cognitive problems that impact on their ability to learn in school.

Sleep Tips for School-aged Children:

- Teach school-aged children about healthy sleep habits.
- Continue to emphasize need for regular and consistent sleep schedule and bedtime routine.
- Make child's bedroom conducive to sleep – dark, cool and quiet.
- Keep TV and computers out of the bedroom.
- Avoid caffeine.

Adapted from <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/sleep-topics/children-and-sleep>

Exercises to Aid Sleep

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| Worry and Happy Boxes | Before bed, have the child write down or create a picture of their worry to put into their Worry Box for safekeeping. They could also use a word or picture to describe a positive moment and store that in their Happy Box. Dollar store boxes are ideal for decorating. |
| 5-4-3-2-1 | Name 5 things you see in the room, 5 things you can hear, 5 places on your body. Then continue to 4-3-2-1, this exercise focuses on the here and now. It limits worrying about the past or the future and can assist in helping the child settle their body. |
| Guided Relaxation | Adult assists the child in settling and noticing their muscles tightening and relaxing from their head to their toes. |
| Deep breaths | Have the child lie on their backs placing their own hand – one on the belly and one on the chest. The child then practices breathing slowly and evenly raising their hands as they take in a breath. They can set a number that they can count to and begin again if needed. |