

Tips for Better Sleep

Sleep is essential, but many of us – kids and adults alike – don't get enough of it. Following these tips can help the whole family rest easy.

Nighttime waking is a habit.

Social contact with parents, feeding and availability of interesting toys encourage the child to be up late. Set limits on attention getting behaviors at night.

Develop bedtime routine.

A bedtime routine is a powerful cue that it is time to sleep. It needs to be simple so the child follow through even if the parent is not present. Share this routine with other caregivers, like sitters.

Pay attention to the sleep environment.

Children and adults depend on their environment for falling asleep. Background noise, location, sleep partners, bedding, favorite toys and lighting can all affect a child's ability to fall asleep. A cool, dark, quiet room is best. Teach children to soothe themselves instead of letting children cry themselves to sleep. Avoid rocking, holding, and other activities that depend on a parent's presence.

Limit time in bed.

Hours spent awake in bed interfere with good sleep hygiene. Children vary in their need for sleep. Infants and toddlers often sleep more than 12 hours, children sleep about 10 hours and adolescents and adults probably only need 8 or 9 hours. Each individual needs a different amount of sleep to be refreshed. A later bedtime may be needed as the first step in changing a sleep pattern.

Establish consistent waking times.

Bed times and waking times should be consistent seven days a week. Waking times are stronger than bed times in establishing sleep rhythms. It is easier to enforce a waking time than a bed time. "Sleeping in" can be a sign of sleep deprivation.

Avoid caffeinated drinks.

Caffeine is a potent stimulant and is present in a wide range of beverages. Children should avoid caffeine completely, while adolescents and adults should avoid consuming it in the late afternoon.



Avoid medications to help your child sleep.

Medications become ineffective over time and may affect daytime alertness. They may also wear off during the night and cause night waking. Some medications may cause nightmares or other types of sleep disturbance.

Discourage excessive evening fluids.

However, restricting fluids is not very effective for bed-wetters. Allow your child to drink to their thirst.

Chart your child's progress.

Use mild praise for successful quiet nights. Mark successful nights on a star chart.

Establish daytime routines.

Regular meals and activity times also help anchor sleep times. This includes regular play time with parents. Routines make it easier for children to wind down to sleep.

Consider medical problems.

Allergy, asthma, or conditions which cause pain can disrupt sleep. Loud snoring or pauses in breathing always require medical evaluation. Consult your physician for help with potential medical causes of sleep disturbance.

Make the bedroom a sleep-only zone.

Remove most toys, games, televisions, computers and radios if your child is having trouble falling asleep or is frequently up at night. These items can signal awake time. One or two stuffed animals are acceptable. Adolescents may need a "home office" outside of the bedroom to do homework.