

You Can Help Your Child Sleep Better – Here’s How ...

Why Sleep Is Important

Children of all ages – from newborns to teens – need plenty of high-quality, restorative sleep to feel well rested and fully functioning during the day. Children who don’t get enough sleep can experience mood changes, attention and memory problems, and behavioral issues, and may not do as well in school. The pediatric sleep specialists at NewYork-Presbyterian have prepared these tips for you to understand the importance of your child’s sleep and to help children develop healthy sleep habits.



How Much Sleep Does Your Child Need?

Age	Recommended Sleep Each Day
4-12 months	12-16 hours, including naps (there are wide variations in normal sleep for infants under 4 months)
1-2 years	11-14 hours (including naps)
3-5 years	10-13 hours (including naps, if they still nap)
6-12 years	9-12 hours
13-18 years	8-10 hours

Tips for Healthy Sleep in Childhood

1. Maintain a Regular Sleep Schedule

You can start doing this when your child is as young as 3 months of age, with a regular bedtime and nap times. Maintain regular bedtimes as your child grows. Even teens should try to go to bed at or near the same time every night – even on weekends. Doing so will teach your child’s body when it is time to sleep and when it is time to wake up.

2. Establish a Repetitive, Soothing Bedtime Routine

A quiet, dark, cool room is best. Younger children often enjoy a soothing bath, followed by getting into their pajamas and cuddling with a parent to read a book or two. Set clear limits, such as how many books you read before you turn out the lights.

3. Prevent Sleep Onset Associations

Some parents put their children to sleep in the parents’ bed and move them to their own beds during the night, only to be greeted by little visitors in the wee hours. Teach your child to fall asleep in her own bed. A small night light is fine, but you’ll need to leave it on all night; otherwise, your child will wake up in the dark calling out for the light.

4. Avoid Stimulation in the Hour Before Bed

Computer screens, video games, cell phones, and televisions are stimulating to the body and may delay the release of sleep-inducing melatonin that your body normally makes at night. Your child should avoid electronics, exercise, caffeine, or any other stimulants that can delay sleep. Older kids who need to do homework on the computer should do it earlier in the evening and save the time before bed for non-electronic homework, such as textbook work and reading.

Common Sleep Issues	How You Can Help
Sleep Onset Association Disorder: Children who become used to falling asleep in a parent’s bed, being rocked, listening to music, or having a light on will need them again if they wake up during the night. The child will call for his/her parents during the night to recreate these conditions in order to fall back to sleep.	Read our sleep tips to learn how to avoid sleep onset associations by establishing a healthy bedtime routine from a young age. Your goal is to get your child to learn to fall asleep in his or her bed with few if any distractions or aids, such as music.
Night Terrors: A couple of hours after falling asleep, the child seems to wake up feeling distressed and scared, but is actually still sleeping. The child may have no recollection of the event.	Night terrors are normal and common and typically pass as the child gets older. If they don’t get better or they get worse, speak with your pediatrician.
Nightmares: Bad dreams usually happen later in the night, during deeper “REM” sleep. The child wakes up terrified by the dream.	Talking about the details of the dreams and avoiding daytime events that may trigger them (such as scary movies) can help prevent nightmares.
Sleep Walking and Talking: These normal behaviors tend to occur more when children are sleep deprived or when bedtime is delayed.	Make sure your child gets enough sleep, and maintain a safe environment (such as blocking off stairs) if he/she tends to sleep walk.
Obstructive Sleep Apnea: As many as 5 percent of children have trouble breathing while sleeping, often due to enlarged tonsils and/or adenoids — most often between the ages of 4 and 8 years. Obstructive sleep apnea can cause persistent, loud snoring. If your child snores and is tired and inattentive during the day, he/she may have obstructive sleep apnea — which can impair school performance and even raise blood pressure.	Talk with your pediatrician if you think your child may have obstructive sleep apnea. He/she may be referred to a pediatric sleep specialist for an evaluation.
Restless Legs Syndrome: Children with this disorder say they have a creepy-crawly feeling in their legs or “growing pains” that are relieved with massage.	May be caused by iron deficiency; see your pediatrician if restless legs are interfering with your child’s ability to fall asleep or stay asleep.
Excessive Daytime Sleepiness: Circadian Rhythm Disorders and Narcolepsy: Children who are often sleepy during the day may be misdiagnosed as being lazy, when in fact they have a disorder that is preventing them from getting the sleep they need.	For circadian rhythm disorders such as delayed sleep phase syndrome, you can help reset the biological clock by giving your child melatonin at night and turning on a bright light in the morning. Narcolepsy can be treated with medication. See your pediatrician for more information.

Sleep disorders and breathing disorders during sleep are some of the most common health problems in childhood. NewYork-Presbyterian has sleep laboratories just for children and adolescents.

This information is brief and general. It should not be the only source of your information on this health care topic. It is not to be used or relied on for diagnosis or treatment. It does not take the place of instructions from your doctor. Talk to your health care providers before making a health care decision.

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