



Understanding your Older Child's Sleep

Ensuring your child has adequate sleep is essential for their health and wellbeing. Children who are sleep deprived are grumpy, irritable and may be hyperactive. Lack of sleep affects their growth, health, development and immune system and also their concentration, verbal creativity, abstract thinking and ability to learn.

- Many children are not getting adequate sleep. The average 2 year old requires about 1 hour 15 minutes during the day and 11 hours 45 minutes at night; by 5 years old, children usually need about 11 hours of sleep at night.
- Children's sleep needs can vary and there is a vast range of 'normal'. Some children will require more sleep than others. The amount of sleep an individual child needs can vary from day to day and will be affected by things like illness, growth spurts and leaps in development.

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For additional fact sheets see www.ihv.org.uk

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- If your child is having difficulties sleeping at night try to make sure they don't take long naps in the afternoon.
- Calming, regular and predictable bedtime routines help children who are poor settlers and resist going to bed. If your child falls asleep late try starting the bedtime routine 1/2 an hour beforehand for a few days. Once this is established start to bring the routine forward by 10-15 minutes. Once your child is used to this new time bring the bedtime forward again by another 10-15 minutes. Do this gradually until your child is going to bed at a reasonable time.
- The food you give your child can affect their sleep. To induce sleep in children at bedtime offer them foods rich in tryptophan at tea-time. Tryptophan stimulates the sleep hormone melatonin. Foods that contain tryptophan include: turkey; pasta; oily fish such as tuna, salmon or mackerel; green leafy vegetables; beans; seeds; bananas and bread.
- Giving foods rich in carbohydrates in the evening also activates tryptophan in the brain, helping to encourage sleep.
- Calcium has a calming effect so warm milk makes the perfect bedtime drink to give your child. Avoid high protein bedtime snacks that activate dopamine, a brain stimulant, and allow 2 hours before bedtime after a protein-rich meal, so your child has plenty of time to digest the meal before going to sleep.
- Clear, firm and consistent boundaries help your child feel secure. Having set bedtimes and regular routines helps to prepare your child for bed and sleep. This enables them to wind down and can be an enjoyable time when you share some one-to-one quality time with each other. The last part of the bedtime routine needs to take place in their bed.
- A night light can help reduce night time fears in young children. Alternatively, leave your landing light on and your child's bedroom door ajar, which provides reassurance if your child is anxious about the dark.
- Comfort objects like a favourite soft toy or blanket can help children sleep. Research shows that comfort objects can help babies and small children to settle themselves to sleep.
- Reward charts can be a useful tool in helping to manage sleep problems in older children (they work best in children who are aged 3 and over). They're most effective when used for a short time to concentrate on tackling a particular problem, such as not staying in their own bed or waking up frequently at night.
- Sleep experts suggest you should not allow your child to watch TV or do any screen viewing 30-60 minutes before bedtime as this alters brain wave patterns, making sleep less likely and affecting the quality of sleep. It may be worth monitoring what your child is watching on TV as even some children's programmes can be disturbing for young children.
- Having a TV in your child's bedroom isn't conducive to encouraging good sleep patterns. Sharing a relaxing story together is preferable to watching TV before bed, which has a negative effect on the quality of your child's sleep.
- If you have any concerns about your child's sleep or are struggling with sleepless nights you can discuss your worries with your Health Visitor. They can offer one-to-one support to help your child – and your whole family – enjoy a better night's sleep.

More information:

NHS Choices has some additional useful information on sleep problems in children here:

bit.ly/1srzCQc