

CHILDREN'S SLEEP HABITS NATIONAL SLEEP FOUNDATION

www.sleepfoundation.org



Every living creature needs to sleep. It is the primary activity of the brain during early development. Circadian rhythms, or the sleep-wake cycle, are regulated by light and dark and these rhythms take time to develop, resulting in the irregular sleep schedules of newborns. The rhythms begin to develop at about six weeks, and by three to six months most infants have a regular sleep-wake cycle.

By the age of two, most children have spent more time asleep than awake and overall, a child will spend 40 percent of his or her childhood asleep. Sleep is especially important for children as it directly impacts mental and physical development.

There are two alternating types or states of sleep:

Non-Rapid Eye Movement (NREM) or "quiet" sleep. During the deep states of NREM 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.

Rapid Eye Movement (REM) or "active" sleep. During REM sleep, our brains are active and dreaming occurs. Our bodies become immobile, breathing and heart rates are irregular.

Babies spend 50 percent of their time in each of these states and the sleep cycle is about 50 minutes. At about six months of age, REM sleep comprises about 30 percent of sleep. By the time children reach preschool age, the sleep cycle is about every 90 minutes.

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.



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.