

Sleep

Does your child have a hard time going to bed or staying in bed? Does your child need your help to fall asleep? Do they wake you up or come into to your bed frequently throughout the night? If this sounds familiar, you will be happy to know that most problems related to your child's difficulty with sleep can be greatly improved by implementing some simple behaviour changes.

Why is sleep important?



One in four children are not getting enough sleep.

Sleep is very important to maintain the healthy growth and development of a child.

Sleep helps children to function at their best. Problems, such as difficulty concentrating, hyperactivity, irritability, can be related to poor sleep quality.

A child's body and brain both need sleep to stay

Waking troubles?

One in three children have trouble going to sleep or staying asleep.

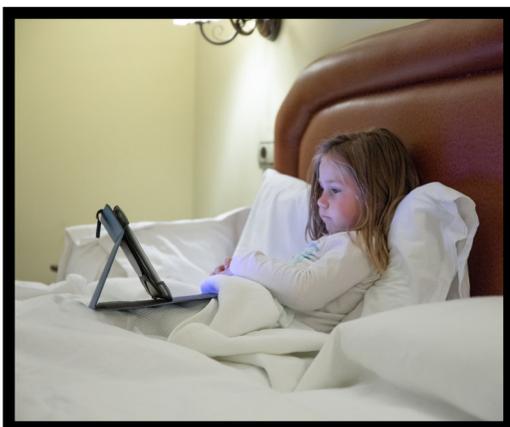
Do you find that your child wakes up in the middle of the night? Do they have difficulty falling back to sleep on their own? Do they need someone to lie with them to fall back to sleep?

It is important that a child falls asleep in the same environment that they wake up in. For example, if there is a night light on it should remain on all night.

It is also important for children to learn how to self-soothe and fall asleep. This allows them to put themselves back to sleep if



Screen time at bedtime



Electronic activities, such as watching television, or using a smartphone or tablet before bed, can make it harder for our bodies to fall asleep. It is recommended to stop all electronic activities at least one hour before bedtime.

The light emitted from electronic devices interferes with our body's sleep pattern. Electronic activities like television shows, video games, or tablet activities can cause more excitement and alertness in children, making it harder for them to fall asleep. Avoid having these electronics in the child's bedroom.

Comfort object

Encourage your child to use an object that they can keep with them all night, and include this object in the night time routine.

Objects like stuffed animals or blankets can be soothing for a child, and can help them fall asleep and provide comfort throughout the night.

If your child likes to sleep with you, wear a t-shirt for a couple of hours, then put it on a stuffed animal. Your child may find comfort in snuggling a stuffy with your scent.

These objects will allow your children to learn to self-soothe and fall asleep, or fall back to sleep on their own.

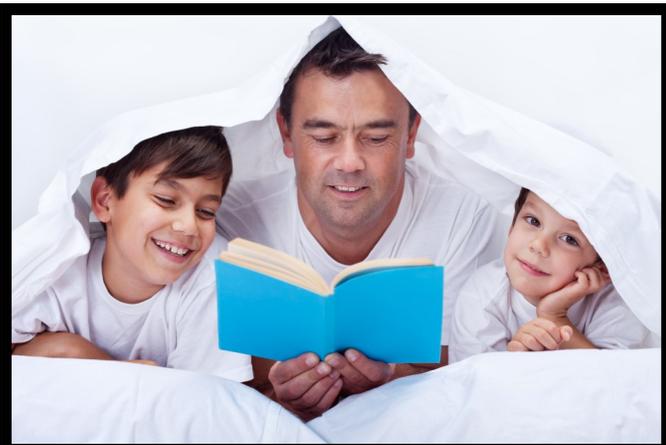


Medical conditions

Some sleep problems can be caused by medications or underlying medical conditions. It is important to see your child's doctor to discuss this possibility.

Consult with your child's family physician:

- If your child has trouble breathing while sleeping, is a loud sleeper or breather, or snores.
- If you are noticing your child's sleep patterns are negatively affecting their behaviour during the day.
- If your child has significant trouble with sleeping, or experiences night terrors or other night time disruptions.
- If your child has stomach or bowel concerns that might be affecting sleep.
- If you have other concerns about your child's sleep.



Before bedtime

- Avoid giving your child a big meal right before bed. A light snack in the hours before bed is enough.
- Reduce snacks high in sugar. Choose healthy proteins.
- Lower your lights and temperature, and turn off any loud electronics to allow for a natural, comfortable environment.
- Try a quiet activity, such as reading a book together.
- Get your snuggles in before lights out!

How to help your child sleep better

Bedroom environment

- Make sure your child's room is quiet, cool, and dark. Use darkening shades or curtains to block any light.
- A nightlight may provide comfort to your child if they have any fears. Leave it on all night.
- Keep the bedroom free from clutter. Try to limit toys and activities from being left out in the bedroom.
- If soft music is played, keep it on continuously throughout the night. **Tip:** Try white noise!

Daily sleep schedule

- Create a consistent sleep schedule for your child. Having the same naptimes, bedtimes, and wake up times each day (even on weekends) will help to set their internal clock.
- Avoid habits, such as going to bed late, having late afternoon naps, or watching television or using a tablet before bed.

Bedtime routine

- Establish a consistent bedtime routine that might include activities, such as bathing, brushing teeth, pajamas and a bedtime story. Consistently follow the routine every day, around the same time.
- Calming activities before bed, such as bedtime stories, should be done in the child's bedroom rather than somewhere else in the house.

Set limits

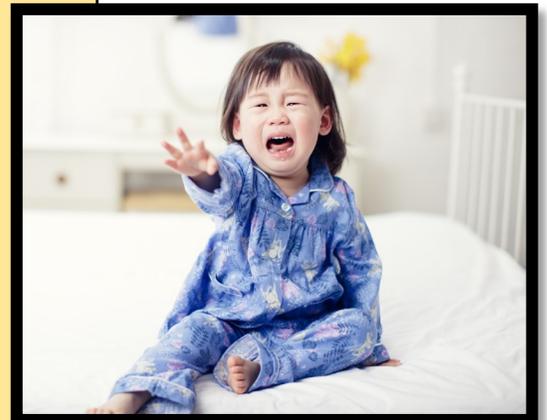
- Set limits around bedtime activities, such as the number of books you and your child read, to prevent stalling.
- Avoid lying down to sleep with your child. Get all your snuggles in prior to bedtime.
- If your child gets out of bed, lead them back to bed quietly. Avoid getting into conversations!

Sleep disturbances

Night wakings, sleep associations, nightmares, night terrors, and separation anxiety are all circumstances that can cause sleep disturbances with your child.

Sleep or night terrors

- Sleep or night terrors occur when a child is in a deep sleep.
- Your child might scream or cry out, look agitated or upset, flail around, or behave strangely. Their eyes might be open, but they are not responsive to your presence.
- Don't wake your child up if they are having a night terror. Keep them safe and try not to interfere.
- They usually last five to 10 minutes, and they aren't upsetting for the child like nightmares, and children have no memory of them.
- Night terrors may run in families.
- Talk with your family doctor about any concerns you may have.



Does your child need you to lie with them to fall asleep?

Do you find yourself in your child's bed to help them fall asleep? Try the following ideas to remove yourself from the bed or bedroom:

- After the nighttime routine, begin by **sitting** on the bed next to your child. Each night, move a bit further down the bed until you are at the end of the bed. Then move to sitting in a chair or on the floor near the bed. Each night, move closer to the door until you are sitting outside the door. Avoid talking to the child during the process.
- Play the “**quiet**” game. Tell your child you will check on them in one minute if they stay quiet. Gradually increase the time between checks.
- Try a “**bedtime pass**” as suggested by Dr. Greene from research by Dr. Friman. Each night, give your child a “bedtime pass” card to be used only once if needed. The pass can be used for a hug, a drink or whatever the child may need. Once the pass is used, the child remains in the room and parents do not answer if they are called.
- Create a **rewards chart**. Start with one night, if your child remains in their bed without you for one night, they will receive a reward that they like. After a few nights, increase the expectation to two nights. Give positive praise and attention for staying in bed on their own.



How much sleep is enough?

Infants: six to 12 months	14 hours (including naps)
Toddlers: one to three years	10 to 13 hours (including naps)
Preschoolers: three to five years	10 to 12 hours (including naps)
School-age: five to 10 years	10 to 12 hours

Resources and information retrieved from

www.durham.ca

www.drgreene.com

www.aboutkidshealth.ca



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