
Promoting Good Sleep for Your Child

In children, it's not always easy to address sleep problems, and sleep disorders often go undiagnosed. How can you know when sleep is a problem for your child? This sheet explains general guidelines for how much sleep children need. It also describes signs of a problem with sleep and tips for improving it.

How much sleep does your child need?

The chart below gives you a sense of how much sleep children need at different ages. But not all children have the same sleep needs. Some children need more sleep than average, some need less. The best way to know whether your child is getting enough sleep is to watch during the day for signs of poor sleep.

Age	Average hours of sleep (including naps)
4 to 12 months	12 to 16 hours
1 to 2 years	11 to 14 hours
3 to 5 years	10 to 13 hours
6 to 12 years	9 to 12 hours
13 to 18 years	8 to 10 hours

Signs of poor sleep

Signs of poor sleep can be confused with many other problems. If you're concerned, be sure to talk with your child's healthcare provider. Common signs and symptoms of poor sleep in children include:

- Hyperactivity
- Irritability
- Poor concentration or problems with memory
- Learning problems
- Trouble waking up in the morning
- Daytime sleepiness or falling asleep in school (more common in older children)
- Sleeping longer on weekends than during the week
- More injuries and accidents
- Bedwetting

Helping your child get better sleep

Here are a few things you can do to help your child get good sleep:

- Keep a sleep diary. Note how much sleep your child is getting, when they get sleepy at night, and whether signs of sleep problems appear during the day.

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- Set a regular bedtime and stick to it. Watch for signs of sleepiness and get your child to bed *before* they are very sleepy. An overtired child may get a “second wind.” This makes it harder to get them into bed.
 - Encourage relaxing bedtime activities, such as reading or bathing.
 - Make bedtime a special time with your child. Keep the routine the same each night.
 - Don't eat big meals close to bedtime. Don't give your child foods or drinks with caffeine. If your child eats things like chocolate, avoid it within 6 hours of bedtime.
 - Keep the bedroom dark, quiet, and not too hot or too cold. Soothing music may help your child sleep.
 - Don't have emotional conversations close to bedtime.
 - Encourage plenty of exercise during the day. But don't exercise within 2 hours of bedtime.
 - Cut down on activities if a busy schedule is affecting your child's sleep.
 - Keep televisions, computers, phones, and other electronic devices out of your child's bedroom.
 - Take steps to help your child lose weight, if needed. Talk to your child's healthcare provider about this. Extra weight can increase the risk of sleep disorders, which can keep your child from getting good sleep.

Signs of sleep disorders

Have you taken steps to improve your child's sleep, but your child is still not sleeping well? Have you observed any of the following signs? If so, contact your child's healthcare provider. You may be referred to a sleep specialist for a sleep evaluation.

- Chronic tiredness
- Snoring
- Hyperactivity
- Periodic pauses in breathing while asleep
- Waking in the night and having trouble getting back to sleep
- Falling asleep suddenly during the day
- Rhythmically kicking or moving the body during sleep
- Ongoing problems sleeping well at night
- Excessive sleepwalking