

# Healthy Sleep in Children

Sleep is essential for your child's physical and mental health, and normal growth and development. Getting enough and good quality sleep positively impacts your child's quality of life, memory, learning, attention, and behavior. Therefore, it is important to enforce good sleep habits early in your child's life.

This fact sheet has information and tips for healthy sleep in children. For information on infants, read the ATS fact sheets on *Healthy Sleep in Infants* at [www.thoracic.org/patients](http://www.thoracic.org/patients). For information on adults and teens, read the ATS fact sheets on *Healthy Sleep in Adults* and *Healthy Sleep in Teens* at [www.thoracic.org/patients](http://www.thoracic.org/patients).



## How much sleep is enough?

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) has set guidelines that define the amount of sleep needed by children to promote optimal health. This general guideline applies to most children but some children could have different sleep needs. Children need less sleep as they get older, but studies suggest that many are still not getting as much as they need.

Age of Child	Recommended sleeping hours per 24 hours
Newborns–3 months	16–18 hours
4 months to 12 months	12 to 16 hours
1 year to 2 years	11 to 14 hours
3 years to 5 years	10 to 13 hours
6 years to 12 years	9 to 12 hours
13 years to 18 years	8 to 10 hours

## Are naps okay for my child?

Napping is a normal behavior in children. Newborns and young infants may take several naps during the day. By 9-12 months, infants have a pattern of 2 naps a day and by 15-24 months, most children may take only a single long afternoon nap. Most children stop napping once they are 4-5 years old.

A poorly timed nap can affect your child's sleep at night. If your older child is napping very late during the day this may result in difficulty falling asleep at bedtime. Need for poorly timed or frequent naps may indicate that your child is not getting enough sleep at night, is having poor quality sleep, or has a sleep related breathing disorder, such as obstructive sleep apnea.

## What are the signs that my child is not getting enough sleep?

Children who do not get enough sleep can show decreased levels of alertness, poor school performance, and bad mood. Young children may even have too much energy or hyperactivity leading to behavior issues. In teenagers, it can sometimes show up as mood changes and irritability. You should suspect that your child may not be having enough good sleep if he or she falls asleep in the following situations:

- while sitting and reading
- watching television
- sitting inactive in a public place such as a movie theater or classroom
- riding in a car for an hour without a break
- lying down to rest in the afternoon when they have the chance
- sitting and talking to someone
- sitting quietly after lunch, doing homework, or while taking a test

## What can happen if your child does not get enough sleep?

If your child does not get enough sleep, he or she may have a condition called sleep deprivation. Sleep deprivation can cause learning, behavior, and mood problems in children. If poor quality and quantity of sleep continues until adulthood, it can increase the risk of getting certain medical conditions like hypertension (high blood pressure), obesity, adult-onset diabetes and depression.

## How can I help my child get better sleep?

It is important to enforce good sleep habits starting when your child is very young. Below are general tips to ensure

your child has good and safe sleep. This is also called having good “sleep hygiene.” For older children, creating a good bedtime routine together may encourage active participation.

- Keep an early and consistent bedtime that is appropriate for your child’s age every night. Set these bedtimes and wake up times the same on weeknights and weekends.
- Keep a regular bedtime routine lasting no more than 15 -20 minutes. For example, this can include brushing one’s teeth, bathing, and choosing clothes for the next day.
- Turn lights off or dim them at bedtime to indicate that it is time to go to sleep. This helps the body feel sleepy.
- Engage in quiet activities before bedtime.
- Teach your child to fall asleep on his or her own at bedtime. Place your child in the crib or bed awake.
- Keep the room cool, dark, and comfortable but not too cold or hot.
- Teach your child to wake up and get up at the same time every morning. You may want to use a night light or table lamp that turns on to indicate that it is the right time to get up.
- Keep a consistent age-appropriate nap time every day.
- Avoid keeping electronic devices in the bedroom.
- Set a “technology curfew” (also referred to as “screen time”) and avoid video games, cell phones, and watching TV 2 hours before bedtime.
- Encourage exercise during the daytime but avoid vigorous exercise 2-3 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid large meals before bedtime. Eat a light healthy snack if hungry before bed.
- Remove caffeine containing foods or liquids from your child’s diet (such as tea, dark or clear soda, coffee, energy drinks, chocolate).

#### What are signs that my child may have a sleeping problem?

- Difficulty falling asleep lasting more than 20 minutes
- Bedtime refusal
- Night time awakenings that happen often or for long periods of time
- Child cannot fall back to sleep on his or her own
- Snoring and pauses in breathing during sleep
- Difficulty in breathing or mouth breathing during sleep
- Falling asleep in school, poor school performance, difficulty paying attention

#### What should you do if your child has a sleeping problem?

First try using the tips listed. Keep a sleep diary of your child where you record when your child goes to bed and wakes up, if he naps, the amount of “screen” time, and if

he or she drinks any caffeine-containing food or drinks. Discuss your concerns about your child’s sleep problems with his or her primary care provider. Your healthcare provider will want to see your child’s sleep diary and will ask about any medications your child is taking and any other health problems. Your child may need further evaluation and to be referred to see a sleep specialist. It is important to seek help and get treatment early for your child’s sleep problems to prevent future health issues and to have him or her live a healthy life!

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### **Rx** Action Steps

- ✓ Make sure your child gets the right amount of sleep hours per day for his or her age.
- ✓ Enforce regular bedtimes, good night time routines, and regular morning awakenings.
- ✓ Follow good sleep hygiene tips.
- ✓ Discuss any concerning sleep symptoms that your child may have with your child’s primary healthcare provider or a sleep specialist.
- ✓ Be an example yourself for good sleep to your child!

**Healthcare Provider’s Contact Number:**

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#### Additional Resources:

**Sleep Education – American Academy of Sleep Medicine**  
[www.sleepeducation.org](http://www.sleepeducation.org)

**Healthy Children – American Academy of Pediatrics**  
<https://www.healthychildren.org/english/healthy-living/sleep/pages/default.aspx>

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
[www.cdc.gov/sleep](http://www.cdc.gov/sleep)

**National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute**  
[www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/resources/sleep](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/resources/sleep)

**American Thoracic Society**  
<https://www.thoracic.org/patients>

<https://www.thoracic.org/statements/resources/sleep-medicine/healthy-sleep.pdf>

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