

# ENCOURAGING YOUR CHILD TO HAVE GOOD SLEEP HABITS

(You may also hear good sleep habits referred to as ‘Sleep hygiene’)

## How can I help my child to sleep?

Following considerable research a set of guidelines and tips have been developed for you to help your child to sleep better. There is much evidence to suggest that these strategies can provide long-term solutions to sleep difficulties.

We recommend you follow these tips as the initial treatment of primary insomnia (children who are unable to get to sleep rather than those who wake during the night.)

## Bedtime routine

- 1) It is important that the time your child goes to bed and the routine remains consistent. Late nights and sleeping in can disrupt the routine for days.
- 2) Before going to bed ensure that your child:
  - ◆ Goes to the toilet
  - ◆ Is not hungry - main meals should be eaten 1 ½ to 2 hours before bedtime, however, your child may wish to have a snack such as cereal prior to bedtime
  - ◆ Is not thirsty – ensure your child drinks plenty throughout the day. A warm milky drink prior to bedtime may help your child to feel sleepy

These measures will avoid any excuse for needing to get up again.

- 3) Your child’s bedroom should be cool, quiet and comfortable. Ensure the bedroom is dark enough, especially in the summer months. The hours of darkness cause us to produce a natural hormone called Melatonin which causes us to feel sleepy.
- 4) Bedtime should follow a predictable sequence of events, for example:
  - ◆ Thirty minutes to an hour before bedtime commences, a sleep-calming activity (reading, playing a board game, conversations about the day)
  - ◆ Warm drink
  - ◆ Snack if required
  - ◆ Warm bath/shower
  - ◆ Toilet
  - ◆ Brush teeth
  - ◆ Read a story
- 5) Children should be put to bed drowsy, but still awake . Letting them fall asleep in other places forms habits that are difficult to break.
- 6) Have a **short** story/reading time in bed or “talk time” to ensure you child has no worries or anything they **have** to tell you before they go to sleep. Relaxation techniques such as imagining positive scenes like being on a beach can help your child relax.

- 7) Tell them when it is time to sleep, say goodnight and tell them how to sleep, for example: lie down, pull the covers up, close your eyes, stay still.
- 8) Security objects or comforters at bedtime often help children feel safe and secure when their parent is not present. Try to include a doll, toy or blanket when you cuddle or comfort your child, which may help them adopt the object.
- 9) When checking on your child at night, checks should be brief and you should not stimulate your child or engage in conversation. The purpose is to reassure your child and reinforce that it is time to sleep.
- 10) Keep a sleep diary to keep track of naps, sleep times and activities to find patterns and target problem areas when things are not working.

### Tips for dealing with sleeplessness

1. If your child is awake in bed, tossing and turning, it is better for them to get out of bed to do a low stimulation activity, for example, reading, then return to bed later. This prevents the bed from becoming associated with sleeplessness. If they are still awake after twenty to thirty minutes, spend another twenty minutes out of bed before lying down again.
2. If your child is never drowsy at the planned bedtime, you can try a temporary delay of bedtime by thirty minute increments until your child appears sleepy. This is so that they experience falling asleep more quickly once they get into bed. The bedtime should then be gradually advanced earlier until the desired bed time is reached.

### Diet and Lifestyle

Ensuring your child has a suitable diet and the correct amount of exercise may also help to improve sleep habits.

Avoid	Replace with
<b>CAFFEINE CONTAINING DRINKS</b> (Cola, chocolate, tea, coffee, energy drinks) in the afternoon/evenings. This may also lead to shallow sleep and frequent awakenings	Plenty of water, juice, squash or milk during the day and warm milk just before bed
<b>STIMULATING ACTIVITIES LESS THAN AN HOUR BEFORE BEDTIME AND DURING NIGHT TIME AWAKENING</b> (exercise, watching TV, computer games, telephones, use of tablet computers)	Calming activities (reading, playing board games, conversations about the day)
<b>SPENDING LOTS OF NON-SLEEP TIME IN BED</b> (watching TV, computer games, telephones, using tablet computers)	Performing these activities in other rooms of the house so your child associates the bedroom with sleep
<b>HAVING VIDEO GAMES, TELEVISIONS OR TELEPHONES IN YOUR CHILD'S BEDROOM</b>	Calming activities (reading, playing board games, conversations about the day)
<b>LIMITING PHYSICAL EXERCISE</b>	Having physical exercise as part of the day often helps with sleep time as children will only sleep when they are tired.

For more information:

Talk to your Health Visitor, School Nurse or Community Paediatrician

Visit [www.sleepcouncil.com](http://www.sleepcouncil.com)

'The Good Night Guide for Children' the Sleep Council