



KIDS' GUIDE TO GOOD SLEEP

On average, school-age children need about 9.5 hours of sleep a night in order to wake spontaneously the next morning and feel fully rested. Unfortunately, most kids get only 7.5 hours a night.

Also, sleep deprivation is cumulative. This "sleep debt" increases over time, causing their performance to suffer and kids to feel more sleepy with each succeeding day of insufficient sleep. Parents should look for some of the following signs that their children's sleep is insufficient either in quantity or quality:

- Does not wake up spontaneously in the morning, but must be awakened, sometimes with great difficulty.
- Often has a rushed or missed breakfast because he or she frequently oversleeps.
- Appears sleepy during the day either to the teacher, to you, or to both. Some sleep-deprived children fall asleep in school, particularly when they are bored.
- You or the teachers note that your child is having trouble concentrating on work or finishing tasks.
- Seems irritable, particularly late in the day. This may also be reflected in behavior problems and unexpectedly poor academic performance.
- Falls asleep after coming home from school in the afternoon.
- Sleeps much longer and later on weekends than during the week (repaying an accumulated "sleep debt").

It's much easier to prevent a sleep problem than to treat one, so here are some tips to help your child establish life-long patterns of good sleep:

- Set a regular bed time and stick to it.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine, typically around 30 minutes, such as giving your child a warm bath or reading a story.
- Make after-dinner playtime a relaxing time. Too much activity close to bedtime can keep children awake.
- Avoid big meals close to bedtime.
- Avoid giving children caffeinated products less than six hours before bedtime.
- Set a comfortable bedroom temperature – not too warm or cold.
- Keep the bedroom dark. If necessary, use a small nightlight. Expose your child to natural sunlight soon after awakening in the morning.

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- Keep the noise level low.
- Don't give in to requests for one more kiss or a tissue. A firm and consistent approach to a stall tactic will help avoid reinforcing the behavior. If your child needs to use the bathroom, send him by himself. This limits more contact with you.
- Except for younger children who need naps, avoid naps during the day.
- Exercise can promote good sleep, but not within three hours of bedtime.
- Avoid emotional conversations, watching TV that is exciting or scary, or playing electronic games before bedtime.
- Keep the TV out of your child's bedroom.
- Talk with your pediatrician about medications that may affect your child's sleep. Ask for melatonin or, in certain cases, medication, if necessary.
- If your older child is having sleep problems, encourage her to keep a sleep diary to record how much time she slept the night before and how she feels the next day. After one week, review the diary with her and look for potential influences on the quality and quantity of her sleep, such as watching TV, drinking something caffeinated or arguing with a sibling before bed.

The American National Center on Sleep Disorders Research has an online resource that includes downloadable diaries and games featuring Garfield the cat:

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/sleep/starslp/index.htm>

For more information or if you have questions, don't hesitate to contact us. We offer a variety of wellness initiatives for kids and grown-ups.