Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children
NHS Foundation Trust

Patient Information Leaflet

Paediatric Sleep

Helping your child get a good night's sleep

Contents

Introduction to Sleep 3
A bit about sleep 3
Sleep environment 6
Sleep associations and sleep props 6
Promote relaxation and sleepiness 7
Relaxation exercises 8
How electronics 'steal' your sleep 9
Your screen/tech log 10
Older children and teen sleep 11
One week's sleep diary 12
Sleep Diary Template 13
Extra Hints and Tips 14
A typical busy family routine 15
Routine example 16
Blank routine template 17
Useful telephone numbers and resources 18

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Introduction to Sleep

This booklet has been written to help support you to help your child/teen get a good night's sleep and to relieve some of the worries you may be feeling as a parent.

Helping your child to get a good night's sleep is probably one of the most important things you can do for them because achieving good quality sleep will not only improve your child's physical health, but also their educational, social and emotional well-being.

A bit about sleep

Sleep drive

Sleep drive or sleep pressure is what makes your child feel sleepy and builds up throughout the day. This starts from the time they wake up to the time they go to bed and affects their readiness for sleep.

To make sure that your child's sleep drive is at the level needed to achieve good sleep, it is important that they have:

- Regular daily exercise
- Set wake times
- Naps which are appropriately timed and not too close to bedtime (young children)
- No daytime sleeps (older children)

If your child has long lie-ins or late naps, your child's sleep drive and readiness for sleep will be reduced.

Circadian rhythm

Your body has many Circadian rhythms (24 hour cycles). One of the most important is your child's 24 hour sleep/wake clock. Keeping the body clock on track is really important for good sleep. You can help them by:

- Encouraging set sleep and wake times every day
- Encouraging exposure to daylight when waking up
- Providing a dimly lit evening environment a few hours before bed. Darkness signals our body to release the sleep hormone, 'melatonin'

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Melatonin

Melatonin is a sleep hormone that your child naturally produces. The hormone helps your child to feel ready for sleep.

The body's signal to releasing this hormone is darkness. Bright lights and using a screen/phone/laptop etc. a few hours before bedtime may therefore delay the production of melatonin and will lead to sleep difficulties.

Arousal system

When your child is excited, anxious or stressed before bed it is almost impossible for them to be able to sleep. It is therefore essential to make sure that they have the opportunity to relax and unwind before bed.

Recommended sleep needs of children based on age.

AGE	Average sleep requirements per 24 hours
1-2 years	11-14 hours (including a daytime nap)
3-5 years	10-13 hours
6-13 years	9-11 hours
Teens	8-10 hours

https://www.sleepfoundation.org/how-sleep-works/how-much-sleep-do-we-really-need | March 2021

To work out your child's sleep needs, refer to the table above and count back from the time your child has to get up on a weekday.

For example, if your child is 11 years old (recommended sleep need is around 9-11 hours) and has to be up for school at 7.00am, their bedtime should be between 8.00pm and 10.00pm.

It is important to remember that every child's sleep needs are different and very individual.

To assess whether your child is getting enough sleep, observe their daytime sleepiness and functioning, their mood and behaviour and if they feel refreshed in the morning.

Signs of an older child not getting enough sleep:

- Difficult to wake in a morning
- Falls asleep during the day—in the car, reading a book, at school.
- Low mood, irritability and difficult behaviour

Signs of an older child going to bed too early:

- Reporting not feeling sleepy
- Spending a long time in bed awake

Why is it important to have the same bedtime routine each night?

It is important to have a set bedtime routine which should consist of 3 to 4 brief stages.

- This helps your child to learn and accept that bedtime is soon
- Being able to identify a beginning and an end point helps your child to feel in control of their bedtime and helps them to settle
- Transitioning from the busy part of the house to the bedroom is effective in helping your child to wind down ready for sleep

Exercise in the day time.

Getting daily daylight exposure or being in a well-lit environment as soon as your child wakes up helps their sleep/wake clock recognise day from night. It also:

- Helps your child to burn off all excess energy
- Releases happy hormones

Can Diet affect my sleep?

Food and drink that contain caffeine can be very stimulating and delay sleep. These stimulating effects of caffeine can last between 5 and 7 hours. It is therefore advised that you do not give your child any caffeine related foods or drinks between 5 and 7 hours before their bedtime.

Foods that contain caffeine include:

- Fizzy drinks
- Coffee
- Tea
- Hot chocolate
- Energy drinks

The timing of the last meal before bed may prevent a good night's sleep if a large meal is eaten too close to bedtime.

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Children who have an early last meal or eat small amounts may need a bedtime snack to prevent night-time hunger.

Good choices of bedtime snacks include:

- Cheese
- Banana
- Oats
- Yoghurt
- Milk

Sleep environment

Your child will have many sleep cycles consisting of light, deep and dream (REM) sleep throughout the night which last for around 1-1.5 hours (60 to 90 minutes).

At the end of each sleep cycle your child will have a natural and expected 'mini arousal'. If anything has changed in their sleep environment from the time that they went to sleep to the time of their 'mini arousal', they may wake fully.

Common changes in sleep environments include:

- Lights or music being turned off
- Parents sneaking out of the bedroom once asleep
- Moving your child's sleep location

They are likely to have become dependent upon a certain sleep environment or sleep prop which are known as sleep associations.

Sleep associations and sleep props

Sleep associations are a common cause of frequent night time awakenings.

To help your child become an independent sleeper, it is important to remove associations or sleep props which are things that your child relies upon to be able to get to sleep and stay asleep. Your child is likely to continually seek these during the night during their natural mini arousals before they are able to get back to sleep.

Common sleep associations include:

- Parental presence
- Music
- Milk feeds
- TV
- Phones
- Cuddles and rocking to sleep

Removing sleep associations/props at bedtime and during the night will help to stop frequent night awakenings.

Promote relaxation and sleepiness

It is important to give your child the time and opportunity to relax and unwind from the day, before putting them into bed.

Making sure that electronics stop being used at least an hour before bed and encouraging a dimly lit environment, will help your child to produce the hormone 'melatonin' which helps your child to feel sleepy.

Removing electronic devices, alongside other toys from the bedroom will also prevent sleep distractions and help your child to settle at bedtime.

Having a specific 'worry time' a few hours before bedtime and practising relaxation exercises as part of the bedtime routine, often helps to tackle worries and anxieties for those children who suffer with worries.

If your child feels upset due to tasks they find stressful or are excited on the lead up to bed, they may find it difficult to get a good night's sleep. These tasks or activities might include doing homework, having a bath, cleaning their teeth or exercise.

Allowing them time to feel settled and relaxed in time for bed will aid sleep and some ideas include:

- Listening to relaxing music
- Doing stressful/exciting tasks earlier
- Massage
- Stretch and sink exercise (see page 8)
- Belly breathing exercise (see page 8)

Relaxation exercises

Breathing exercises

Use the following steps as part of your child's bedtime routine to help them relax and feel calm at bedtime.

1. Ensure that you are lying in your bed.
2. Take in a big, slow breath through your nose.
3. Feel the breath fill up your belly like a balloon.
4. Count slowly to 4 while you breathe in.
5. Slowly blow out your breath through your mouth like you are blowing out a candle.
6. Count slowly to 6 while you breathe out.
7. Repeat at least 10 times.

Stretch and sink muscle relaxation

1. Lie flat on your back with your leg and arms out straight.
2. Point your toes as far as you can to the bottom of your bed and count to 5.
3. Point your toes towards your head as much as possible and count to 5, now relax and let your legs sink into the bed.
4. Now point your fingers and stretch your arms towards your legs as much as you can and count to 5.
5. Now open and close your hands 10 times, making sure you stretch your fingers out wide, now relax and let your arms sink into the bed.
6. Now shut your eyes as tight as possible and count to 5, now relax.
7. Now lie on your bed and do 5 slow and deep breaths.
8. If your body still feels restless do the stretching and sinking and breathing again cycle one more time.

Huebner D & Matthews B, (2005) *What to do When You Worry Too Much* Magination Press

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How electronics 'steal' your sleep

- The use of electronic devices often causes excitement and release of stimulating hormones which delay sleep.
- The light from electronic devices impacts on your child's ability to produce the sleep hormone melatonin and prevents the feeling of sleepiness.
- The use of electronics often distracts us from trying to get to sleep and therefore achieving sleep.

How to help

- If your child does not seem ready for bed or takes a long time to fall asleep, we recommend that you look at their electronic use and encourage an electronic curfew (a set time each day to switch the electronics off).
- Having an electronic curfew at least an hour before bed (or longer if possible) is often the key to helping your child achieve a good night's sleep.
- Any activity that promotes calmness and requires concentration is an important alternative from screens and will significantly help your child's readiness for sleep at bedtime. This also gives you and your child some nice quality time at the end of each day.
- Use the electronic log on page 10, to help you and your child to review their current electronic use and look at changing it to help their sleep.
- If your child uses electronics to relax at bedtime or to aid sleep and wakes frequently throughout the night, it may be that they have become reliant upon these devices to get to and stay asleep. This is known as a sleep association. Stopping this use and encouraging a wind down (tech free) time before bed will pay dividends.

Below are alternative activity suggestions that are recommended as part of your child's bedtime routine and wind down time.

Lego	Reading	Spot the difference
Jigsaws	Audio books	Dot to dot
Colouring/drawing	Relaxing music	Puzzle books
Play dough	Sensory box	Board game
Slime play	Fidget toys	Blowing bubbles
Sewing/cross stitch	Massage	

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Your screen/tech log

	Device	Minutes used	Location	Activity	Latest time of use	Importance of this activity to you	Why is this important to you?	Are you willing to change this?
Example	Gaming console Computer Phone TV Other:	0 – 1 hour 1 – 2 hours 3 – 4 hours 4 + hours	Bedroom Living area Other:	U Tube Gaming Social media Other: Movie	6.30pm	High Medium Low	In touch with friends	Yes Maybe No
Monday								
Tuesday								
Wednesday								
Thursday								
Friday								
Saturday								
Sunday								

Thompkins M, Thompson M (2018) *The Insomnia Workbook for Teens* New Harbinger

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Older children and teen sleep

To promote and maintain your child's sleep, follow the advice in this booklet and further guidance below.

Around the time of puberty, your teenager's sleep clock will naturally shift. This will lead them to naturally needing a later bedtime.

- Review your child's bedtime if they are lying awake in bed for prolonged periods despite following all the advice in this booklet.
- Whilst it may be tempting for your child to sleep in on a weekend, it can disrupt their body clock and sleep drive. Keep their bedtime and wake time on weekends within 1 hour of what it is during the week.
- Avoid sleeping during the day.

It is likely that your teen will spend much of their time in their bedroom. Whilst this is expected, it is important to know that spending time in their room gaming, eating and socialising, can actually dilute the association with their bed and sleep, and cause conditioned arousal.

Conditioned arousal leaves your child feeling awake, anxious or tense whilst in bed. To prevent this, we recommend following the stimulus control interventions below.

Stimulus Control

One of the reasons your child may have a hard time falling asleep and/or staying asleep is that their body has learned to spend a lot of time in bed not sleeping. The goal of stimulus control is to re-teach their body and brain that when you get into bed you should fall asleep.

The rule of stimulus control is that **the bed is for sleep, and sleep is for the bed.** The guidance below will help you to follow this rule and use stimulus control to help your child's sleep.

Use the bed only for sleep. Your child should try to avoid other activities, such as watching TV, text messaging, using Facebook, surfing the Internet, talking on the phone, or doing homework, so that the brain doesn't forget that the bed is for sleep.

Sleep should only occur in bed. Avoid sleeping on the couch or in other places, because this can also get in the way of your child's ability to make the connection between their bed and sleep.

Allocating different areas in the bedroom for gaming, homework and watching TV is an alternative if other areas of the house cannot be used.

From Meltzer LJ, McLaughlin V (2015) *Pediatric Sleep Problems: A Clinicians Guide to Behavioural Interventions*.

One week's sleep diary

To help you to see if there is any room for improvement in your child's early evening and bedtime routine we have included one week's sleep diary for you to complete and review.

Things to consider when reviewing your child's diary are:

Is your child's bedtime the same each day?

Does your child have a set wake time each day?

Are they allowed long lie-ins?

Does your child have age appropriate naps?

Is your child having enough sleep opportunity?

Does your child have the opportunity to wind down from a busy day?

Do they have a set and consistent bedtime routine?

Does your child feel stimulated, scared or distracted in their bedroom

Is your child's bedroom too light, dark, at the right temperature, noisy, too quiet? Light sleepers often benefit from white noise.

Does your child have the opportunity for exercise and fresh air each day?

Do they have an appropriate electronic curfew at least an hour before bed?

Does your child rely on anything in order to get to sleep and stay asleep?

Do all care givers consistently keep the same bedtime rules and boundaries?

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Sleep Diary Template

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Time your child woke for the day							
Times and length of daytime sleeps							
Duration of time spent outdoors, participating in exercise/active play							
What was your child doing during the hour before bed?							
What time were electronics turned off?							
Time in bed							
Time your child attempted to fall asleep							
Time your child fell asleep							

Extra Hints and Tips

Encouraging independent sleeping—extinction methods

Many children find it difficult to fall asleep without a parent in the bedroom. There are many methods of teaching your child to fall asleep independently (rapid return, gradual retreat, check in and take a break) and it is important to choose a method that feels right and manageable for your family.

For more information, please ask your health visitor / school nurse or look at the websites in the resource section in this booklet.

Children who are afraid of their bedroom

- Spend time playing in the bedroom during the day, taking regular breaks and leaving your child for brief periods.
- Plan little treasure hunts in the room. Make the finds easy to begin with but then getting harder which means that they are in the room for longer periods.
- View your child's room from their perspective. Are there scary shadows, noises etc?
- Discuss and list your child's bedtime fears and support them whilst they work on them. For example, if being alone in the dark is their fear, work on them being alone in the daytime first.

Things that help bedtime transitions

Visual aids and timetable pictures of each stage of the bedtime routine placed on a visual timetable often help children to learn and accept the bedtime routine.

Timers, using a visual clock or timer for each stage of the bedtime routine will help prevent bedtime stalling and conflict.

Reward charts and stickers for completion of each stage of the bedtime routine will often encourage your child to feel proud of completing each stage.

Early risers—the morning light

Children who cannot tell the time often do not know when morning time is. Using a night light (on a timer) as a visual aid often helps them understand when it is time to get up.

If your child currently uses a night light – set this to go off at morning time.

If your child does not currently use a night light – set this to go on at morning time.

A typical busy family routine

Take a look the family routine below and see if you can spot the 5 potential sleep thieves!! (Turn the page upside down to see the answers).

3.30pm	Home from school Relax watching TV
4.30pm	Evening meal
6.30pm to 8.00pm	Playing outside on the trampoline and in the garden
8.00pm to 8.30pm	Playing on computer
8.30pm	Upstairs Into bedroom Homework
9.00pm	Lights out

1) Exercise close to bedtime (within 2 hours of bedtime. 2) early evening meal so may wake with nighttime hunger. 3) lots of electronic use within an hour of sleep time. 4) Homework may cause stress near to bedtime. 5) No wind down time

Routine example

Below is an example of a good early evening and bedtime routine for an 11 year old with a 9.00pm bedtime.

Use the additional blank template on the next page to complete your own.

Bedtime Routine	Time	Ideas for your child
Exercise	Before evening meal	To burn off pent up energy.
Teatime	5.00pm	No foods or drinks containing caffeine.
Homework	Before wind down time	Do all 'hard tasks' or things that cause worry, stress or upset before wind down time.
Electronic Curfew and wind down time	From 8.00pm (earlier if able)	Locking phones and remotes away or switching the Wifi off may help in those children that sneak devices or hide their use.
Bath time	8.30pm	Relaxing bath (10-15 minutes)
Reading/audiobooks/relaxation exercises.	8.45pm	Audio books
Lights out	9.00pm	

Blank routine template

Use the example on the previous page to help you complete your own.

Bedtime Routine	Time	Ideas for your child
Exercise		
Teatime		
Homework		
Electronic Curfew and wind down time		
Bath time		
Reading/audiobooks/relaxation exercises.		
Lights out		

Useful telephone numbers and resources

Useful websites and apps for sleep and meditations

www.headspace.com

www.calm.com

https://insighttimer.com/

www.thesleepcharity.org.uk

www.teensleephub.org.uk

www.healthforteens.co.uk Information and live chats Tuesdays and Thursday

Sleep

Staffordshire Children's Hospital Royal Stoke Paediatric Sleep Service:

www.uhnm.nhs.uk/our-services/sleep-service/

www.sleepcouncil.org.uk

www.thessleepcharity.org.uk

www.sleepscotland.org.uk

www.lullabytrust.org.uk

Bedtime worries and anxieties

www.youngminds.org.uk

Offers support and information on bullying, anger and sleep, resilience. This also includes mental health difficulties for children and their parents.

Parent helpline 0808 802 5544 from 9:30am - 4pm, Monday - Friday

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

www.nomorepanic.co.uk/

Recommended books

No worries
An activity book for young people who sometimes feel anxious or worried
by Dr S Coombes

Relax Kids
Aladdin's Magic Carpet meditations for Children by M Viegas

The Insomnia Workbook for Teens
Skills to help you stop stressing and start sleeping better by M Thompkins

What to do when you worry too much
A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety by D Huebner & B Matthews

What to do when you dread your bed
A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Problems with Sleep by D Huebner & B Matthews