

Sleep tips: How to help your child get a good night's sleep

By SickKids staff

Learn some tips to help your child get enough sleep.

Key points

- Help your child get enough sleep by following a regular schedule, encouraging your child to exercise and follow a balanced diet and limiting caffeine from the afternoon onwards.
- A relaxing routine and a comfortable sleep environment - free of electronics - can also help a child fall asleep more easily and sleep through the night.
- Make the morning routine easier by preparing breakfast and laying out clothes the night before.
- See your child's health-care provider if they seem inattentive or sleepy during the day or experiences loud snoring or pauses in their breathing at night.

Sleep brings your child a wide range of [physical and mental benefits](#). From birth onwards, your child's wellbeing depends on their getting enough sleep for their age and activity levels. Following the tips below will help your child fall asleep and stay asleep through the night.

Sleep: A bedtime story



For more videos from SickKids experts, visit [AboutKidsHealth on YouTube](#).

Keep to a schedule

Your child's body likes a regular schedule. Keep a regular sleep routine that allows your child to wake up and go to bed at about the same time every day. During times of stress or uncertainty, it is especially important to keep to a regular schedule of sleep and wake times. Older children may see the lack of formal school or routine as a reason to allow later bedtimes and as a result, later wake up times, but try to encourage them to keep to a regular sleep and wake schedule.

Try to make sure your child falls asleep and wakes up at the same time at least six days a week. Bedtimes and wake times should not vary by more than one hour from one day to the next, including on weekends.

Try to avoid letting your child sleep in late on weekends. Sleeping in can make it harder for your child to keep a regular schedule during the week. If your child is well rested, you can change the schedule once in a while for special events and they can recover from the occasional late night much faster.

Help your child develop healthy habits

Help your child develop and maintain good daily lifestyle habits. These will help make your child comfortable and ready for sleep.

- Encourage your child to get regular exercise.
- Avoid or limit caffeine (from pop, energy drinks, coffee, tea or chocolate) from the afternoon onwards.
- Offer regular, balanced meals based on the four food groups in [Canada's Food Guide](#).

Avoid naps for children aged six and older

A healthy child over six years of age should not need a nap during the day. Daytime naps for older children can affect the time the child will fall asleep at night. This results in a later bedtime and may lead to poorer quality nighttime sleep.

If your child is under six years of age, allow them to have a nap if they need one. If your child is six years old or older, try to limit daytime napping. Napping during the day, or early evening, will make it harder for your child to fall asleep at bedtime.

Create a relaxing routine

Create a relaxing bedtime routine that your child can follow each night. To start, be clear about when it is bedtime each night. For example, tell your child that 8:00pm is 'pyjama time' and 8:30pm is lights out, and stick with those times. If your child has difficulty falling asleep, you could allow extra time by starting their bedtime a little earlier.

Encourage your child to take a bath or shower before bed to help them feel sleepier and more relaxed. Going to bed with a calm state of mind can reduce the risk and frequency of common [sleeping problems](#) such as nightmares, sleep walking and [night terrors](#).

Include 20 to 30 minutes of quiet time in your child's bedtime routine. Good wind-down activities include reading, looking through a magazine, listening to music or writing in a journal. Dimming the lights half an hour before your child's bedtime will help your child feel sleepy.

Avoid and discourage stimulating activities such as playing videogames, using the computer, using a cell phone. [Turn off all electronics](#) at least one hour before bedtime.

Create a comfortable sleep environment

Make sure your child's pyjamas are comfortable and appropriate for the season and that their bedroom is cool and quiet. It is also important for them to sleep on a mattress and pillow that offer good support to their spine.

Keep the bed for sleeping only. In other words, discourage your child from doing their homework or using a computer in bed. These activities can cause your child to link bedtime with stress or active thinking when they are trying to sleep.

Avoid having a television, computer, tablet or cell phone in the bedroom. Watching television or using a computer, tablet or a phone at night can stimulate the brain rather than relax it. In addition, your child may get into the habit of turning on the television or checking their phone if they cannot stay asleep during the night. If you are watching television after your child falls asleep, make sure the volume is low enough that they cannot hear it.

Put a glass of water by the bed so your child does not need to get out of bed if they are thirsty during the night. Make sure the water is in easy reach for your child.

Consider engaging your child's different senses to help them fall asleep. For instance, children who have trouble falling asleep may enjoy the relaxing smell of lavender. You could use lavender scented laundry detergent or place a few drops of lavender oil on your child's pillow.

Tips for a happier morning

Offer your child some options for breakfast and prepare it with your child the night before, if possible. For example, you could cut up fresh fruit and cook oatmeal the night before so you or your child can quickly combine them the next morning.

Help your child choose an outfit the night before. If your child is old enough to get dressed alone, place the outfit somewhere they can easily reach it in the morning.

If your child is in school, help them pack their backpack before bed. Making sure everything is packed and ready to go the night before makes for a much less stressful morning. At night, you have more time to look for something that may be missing or to sign an important school note.

Let your child know what time you will wake them up in the morning. Calmly wake your child in the morning by giving them a hug, gently rubbing their arm or quietly saying their name.

When to see a health-care provider about your child's sleep

Toddler/preschooler

See your child's health-care provider if your child:

- has persistent and loud snoring or pauses or [problems breathing](#) while sleeping
- seems irritable, hyperactive, inattentive or sleepy during the day
- has excessive [anxiety](#) about being separated from you during the day and night
- has just developed a problem with sleep
- finds it hard to change from two naps to one nap a day
- sleepwalks
- has [night terrors](#) or frequent nightmares.

School-aged child

See your child's health-care provider if:

- your child's teacher tells you they seem tired even though you think they get enough sleep
- your child develops new night terrors or sleepwalking habits that they did not have before the age six or seven
- your child needs regular naps
- your child experiences loud snoring, pauses in their breathing or extreme restlessness at night.

Further information

For more tips on maintaining your child's mental health, please see the following pages:

[National Sleep Foundation: Back to School Sleep Tips](#)

[Meant2Prevent](#)

[Physical activity: Guidelines for children and teens](#)

[Physical activity: Benefits of exercise for health and wellbeing](#)

[Screen time: Overview](#)

[Screen time: How to help your child set healthy limits](#)

[Sleep: Benefits and recommended amounts](#)

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