

Parenting Tips for Better Sleep

➤ **Nighttime waking is a habit.**

Social contact with parents, feeding, and availability of interesting toys encourage the child to be up late. Set limits on attention getting behaviors at night.

➤ **Develop bed time rituals.**

A bed time ritual is a powerful "cue" that it is time to sleep. It needs to be simple so the child can "recreate" the ritual even if the parent is not present. A complicated ritual that requires a parent to be present makes it hard for a child to go back to sleep. Try writing out the bed time rituals like a script in order to make it consistent. Share these "scripts" with other caregivers like sitters.

➤ **Pay attention to the sleep environment.**

Children and adults depend on their environment for falling to sleep. Background noises, location, sleep partners, bedding, favorite toys, and lighting can all affect a child's ability to fall asleep. A cool, dark, quiet room is best. Letting children cry themselves to sleep is not recommended. Teach them to soothe themselves. Avoid rocking, holding, and other activities that depend on a parent's presence.

➤ **Limit time in bed.**

Hours spent awake in bed interfere with good sleep hygiene. Children vary in their need for sleep. Even though infants and toddlers often sleep more than 12 hours, children sleep 10 hours, and adolescents and adults probably only need 8 or 9 hours, some individuals are "short sleepers" and others are "long sleepers" and need a different amount of sleep to be refreshed. A later bed time may be needed as the first step in changing a late sleep pattern.

➤ **Establish consistent waking times.**

Bed times and waking times should be consistent seven days a week. Waking times are more potent than bed times in establishing sleep rhythms. It is easier to enforce a waking time than a bed time. "Sleeping in" can be a sign of sleep deprivation.

➤ **Avoid caffeinated drinks.**

Caffeine is a potent stimulant, and is present in a wide range of beverages.

➤ **Avoid medications to help your child sleep.**

Medications become ineffective over time, and may affect daytime alertness. They may also wear off during the night, and cause night wakings. Some medications may cause nightmares or other types of sleep disturbance.

➤ **Discourage excessive evening fluids.**

However, restricting fluids is not very effective for bed-wetters. Allow your child to drink to their thirst.

➤ **Chart your child's progress.**

Use mild praise for successful quiet nights. Mark successful nights on a star chart.

➤ **Establish daytime routines.**

Regular meal and activity times also help "anchor" sleep times. This includes regular play time with parents. Routines make it easier for children to "wind down" to sleep.

➤ **Consider medical problems.**

Allergy, asthma, or conditions which cause pain can disrupt sleep. Loud snoring or pauses in breathing always require medical evaluation. Consult your physician for help with potential medical causes of sleep disturbance.

➤ **Make the bedroom a sleep-only zone.**

Remove most toys, games, televisions, computers, and radios if your child is having trouble falling asleep or is frequently up at night. These items can be powerful cues for wakefulness. This goes along with the recommendation above of limiting time in bed. One or two stuffed animals are acceptable. Adolescents may need a "home office" outside the bedroom to do homework.

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