

Healthy Sleep Habits for Children

What is insomnia?

Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up early in the morning for more than 1 month

What causes insomnia?

- Poor sleep habits by the child, parents or caregivers
- Some medication, even if over-the-counter or a natural herb
- Health conditions (Ex. stress, anxiety, depression, allergies, asthma, loud snoring, ADHD, or pain)

Does my child need sleep medication?

Always use healthy sleep habits – even if the doctor is treating what is causing the insomnia or prescribes sleep medication

Bedtime Routines and Habits

- Go to bed at the same time, even on weekends. Usually, infants and toddlers need more than 12 hours of sleep, children around 10 hours, and teenagers may need at least 9 hours (adults usually need about 8 hours).
- Follow the same routine every night to show that bedtime is soon. Have enough time so lights can go out on time. Ex. Take a warm bath, brush teeth, then read for 15 minutes.
- End the evening quietly without rough-and-tumble play, TV, phones, video games or computers before bedtime.
- Plan ahead! Finish busy work about an hour before bedtime. Ex. Finish homework, lay out clothes for next day.
- Teach your child how to calm down and fall asleep without you. Ex. Use a special blanket, stuffed animal, picture of parent, or gentle music/sound machine that can turn itself off. An older child may try deep breathing or picturing a pleasant and relaxing time, like a day at the beach.
- Put your child to bed drowsy but not asleep. Letting him/her fall asleep only when held or in other places are hard habits to break!
- Be quick, quiet and boring if you have to check on your child at night; set limits to your child's attention-seeking behavior.

Quiet, Comfortable Sleep-Only Zone – Bedrooms are for sleeping!

- Wear comfortable pajamas. Make sure diapers are dry or your older child makes a 'last trip' to the bathroom.
- Pay attention to noises around your child's bed that make it hard to sleep. Ex. Noise coming from a room near by or from others sharing your child's room.
- Keep a cool, dark room with blankets and, if needed, a night-light.
- Take distractions out of the room. Ex. No TV, computer, phone or radio; fewer toys in bed.
- Don't use the child's bed for playtime, studying, or other activities.
- For older children, don't watch the clock in bed at night.

Daytime Routines and Habits

- Get up at the same time every day, even on weekends. It's easier to make a child get up at the same wake-up time than go to bed at the same bedtime.
- No naps during the day (usually after age 5) if it stops sleeping at night.
- Choose healthy foods and eat meals at the same time every day. No caffeine (Ex. tea, soda, energy drinks, chocolate), especially after 5 pm. Don't eat heavy meals close to bedtime; but a light snack is ok when hungry.
- Plan exercise and playtime every day so your child can go to bed sleepy.
- If your child is a worrier, plan a time earlier in the day to talk about worries and concerns.

References:

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