

# Sleep and Your Young Child

Young children need to develop healthy sleep habits for optimal development. Yet, sleep problems, i.e. short sleep duration, behavioral sleep problems and sleep-disordered breathing all peak during the preschool years. Breaking down these sleep problems can help us better understand why sleep is important, how lack of quality sleep can produce negative future outcomes and how we can help our children get the quality sleep they need.



Getting sufficient sleep helps prevent pediatric obesity. Short sleep durations prior to the age of 5 is associated with 30% to 90% increased odds of overweight/obesity at later ages. In 2016, the National Sleep Foundation issued the following recommendations for sleep durations (this includes both daytime and nighttime sleep):

- Newborns (14 to 17 hours)
- Infants (12 to 15 hours)
- Toddlers (11 to 14 hours)
- Preschoolers (10 to 13 hours)

Behavioral sleep problems, difficulty getting to or falling asleep, and irregular bedtime, are associated with 60% to 80% increased emotional and behavioral problems. Irregular bedtimes throughout early childhood are associated with reduced reading, math and spatial reasoning scores. We all know how hard it is to function as an adult being tired. Young children do not have the verbal capacity, or self-regulation skills needed to understand and communicate that they are having a hard day because they are tired. We see young children express tiredness by crying, melting down, yelling, hitting, potty accidents and other outward behavior. Below are a few ways to help your child get to sleep:

- Setting a consistent bedtime and wakeup time will help your child's body get into a natural rhythm. While allowing our children to stay up late and sleep in on weekends is nice, getting your young child out of their routine can affect their bodies' natural rhythm for several days. Try to keep bedtime and wakeup times within 30 to 60 minutes every day.
- Create a consistent and relaxing bedtime routine. Routines are especially important for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. By doing the same specific thing before bed; such as dinner, bath, story, teeth brushing, and songs, will signal your child what is coming next. Knowing what comes next is comforting and relaxing for young children. Calm and relaxing atmosphere is perfect for bedtime. With

- continual routine, your child's body may automatically start to become sleepy at the beginning of their bedtime routine.
- Limiting screen time, especially prior to bedtime. Research has shown that the light emitted from the TV, phone or computer screen can interfere with the production of melatonin.
  - Create a sleep inducing environment. A special lovey toy, soft sheets, room-darkening shades, and quiet relaxing music can help your child differentiate between day and night time, making it easier to fall asleep. Remember children under the age of one should have nothing in their crib.
  - Did you know that your child's sleep cycle isn't just dependent on light; or lack thereof, but also sensitive to temperature? Melatonin levels help to regulate the drop of internal body temperature needed to sleep. You can help regulate the external temperature by not bundling up your child too much, or setting the heat too high. The typical room temperature or a little cooler is better to promote deep sleep.
  - It is very common for young children with active imaginations to have some bedtime fears. Instead of dismissing the fears, address them. If a simple reassurance doesn't work, you can try buying a special toy to "stand guard" at night, or spraying the room with special "monster spray" before bed.
  - Just like adults, sometimes children have a hard time shutting their brains off at night. In my family, we have recently purchased the Calm App off of iTunes. This has helped not only my children but myself as well turn off our brains and relax before bed. There is a child's version called Moshi Twilight Sleep Stories, which I have heard from other parents is fantastic.
  - Be on the lookout for actual sleep disorders. Despite your best effort, if your child consistently continues to have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, snores or breathes unusually heavy, has persistent nightmares or night terrors, or constant bedwetting, they could potentially have a genuine sleep disorder. Talk with your child's pediatrician about your concerns. Also, check with a chiropractor who specializes in young children as they have many methods that can help as well.

Studies show that parents, especially mothers, whose children have early bedtimes have better mental health! If you would like more information on how to help your child sleep, or need some recommendations, please do not hesitate to ask. While we are not an expert, we do know lots of people within our community who can help you, your child and family through the growing pains of early childhood.

Blessings,  
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