

# SAMVEDANA

## IMPORTANCE OF GOODNIGHT SLEEP FOR OUR CHILDREN

Very often when we have our school assemblies in the morning, we find many children dozing off. When asked as to why they are so sleepy, they complain of sleeping late or not sleeping at all. Sleeping well is very crucial to our children's well-being and happiness and so this little write up on the importance of sleep.

Sleep is an essential part of everyone's routine and an indispensable part of a healthy lifestyle. Studies have shown that children who regularly get an adequate amount of sleep have improved attention, behaviour, learning, memory, and overall mental and physical health. Not getting enough sleep can lead to high blood pressure, obesity and even depression.

### **How much sleep do babies and children need?**

Babies, children, and teens need significantly more sleep than adults to support their rapid mental and physical development. Most parents know that growing kids need good sleep, but many don't know just how many hours kids require, and what the impact can be of missing as little as 30 to 60 minutes of sleep time.

One of the reasons it's so hard to know when our kids are getting insufficient sleep is that drowsy children don't necessarily slow down the way we do—they wind up. In fact, sleepiness can look like symptoms of attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Children often act as if they're not tired, resisting bedtime and becoming hyper as the evening goes on. All this can happen because the child is overtired.

There are some underlying conditions, such as attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), that can cause sleep loss in children. Researchers and clinicians are also finding that sleep apnea—which most people tend to think of as an adult sleep disorder—is relatively common in children as well. A person who has sleep apnea wakes up many times every hour, very briefly, as they struggle to breathe. Most people do not know they are experiencing these events unless they are told or have a test to confirm sleep apnea. Children who snore may be at risk for or currently suffering from sleep apnea.

If you suspect your child isn't sleeping enough, it's important to talk to your pediatrician. If there is an underlying sleep disorder or another medical condition at play, your doctor may refer you to a sleep specialist to discuss various treatments options. In many cases, though, sleep deprivation in children can be

helped with changes to the environment and habits surrounding bedtime. Research shows that an early bedtime (between 7:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. works best for babies and kids through school age) and a consistent, soothing, wind-down routine with no screen time—such as TVs, tablets, and the like—will lead to better sleep.

While every child is slightly different in terms of how much sleep they need, most require the following to be fully rested:

New born (0-3 months)

Recommended: 14-17 hours

May be appropriate:

- 11-13 hours (Not less than 11 hours)
- 18-19 hours (Not more than 19 hours)

Infants (4-11 months)

Recommended: 12-15 hours

May be appropriate:

- 10-11 hours (Not less than 10 hours)
- 16-18 hours (Not more than 18 hours)

Toddlers (1-2 years)

Recommended: 11-14 hours

May be appropriate:

- 9-10 hours (Not less than 9 hours)
- 15-16 hours (Not more than 16 hours)

Preschoolers (3-5 years)

Recommended: 10-13 hours

May be appropriate:

- 8-9 hours (Not less than 8 hours)
- 14 hours (Not more than 14 hours)

School-aged Children (6-13 years)

Recommended: 9-11 hours

May be appropriate:

- 7-8 hours (Not less than 7 hours)
- 12 hours (Not more than 12 hours)

Teenagers (14-17 years)

Recommended: 8-10 hours

May be appropriate:

- 7 hours (Not less than 7 hours)
- 11 hours (Not more than 11 hours)

Young Adults (18-25 years)

Recommended: 7-9 hours

May be appropriate:

- 6 hours (Not less than 6 hours)
- 10-11 hours (Not more than 11 hours)

## **How to sleep better for children: tips**

### **1. Set up a bedtime routine**

A regular bedtime routine starting around the same time each night encourages good sleep patterns. A routine of bath, story and bed can help younger children feel ready for sleep. For older children, the routine might include a quiet chat with you about the day then some time alone relaxing before lights out.

### **2. Relax before bedtime**

Encourage your children to relax before bedtime. Older children might like to wind down by reading a book, listening to gentle music or practising breathing for relaxation. If your child takes longer than 30 minutes to fall asleep, he might need a longer wind-down time before turning the lights out to go to sleep.

### **3. Keep regular sleep and wake times**

Keep your child's bedtimes and wake-up times within 1-2 hours of each other each day. This helps to keep your child's body clock in a regular pattern. It's a good idea for weekends and holidays, as well as school days.

### **4. Keep older children's naps early and short**

Most children stop napping at 3-5 years of age. If your child over five years is still napping during the day, try to keep the nap to no longer than 20 minutes and no later than early afternoon. Longer and later naps can make it harder for children to get to sleep at night.

### **5. Make sure your child feels safe at night**

If your child feels scared about going to bed or being in the dark, you can praise and reward her whenever she's brave. Avoiding scary TV shows, movies and computer games can help too. Some children with bedtime fears feel better when they have a night light.

## **6. Check noise and light in your child's bedroom**

A quiet, dimly lit space is important for good sleep. Check whether your child's bedroom is too light or noisy for sleep. Blue light from televisions, computer screens, phones and tablets might suppress melatonin levels and delay sleepiness. It probably helps to turn these off at least one hour before bedtime and to keep screens out of your child's room at night.

## **7. Avoid the clock**

If your child is checking the time often, encourage him to move his clock or watch to a spot where he can't see it.

## **8. Eat the right amount at the right time**

Make sure your child has a satisfying evening meal at a reasonable time. Feeling hungry or too full before bed can make your child more alert or uncomfortable. This can make it harder for her to get to sleep. In the morning, a healthy breakfast helps to kick-start your child's body clock at the right time.

## **9. Get plenty of natural light in the day**

Encourage your child to get as much natural light as possible during the day, especially in the morning. Bright light suppresses melatonin. This helps your child feel awake and alert during the day and sleepy towards bedtime.

## **10. Avoid caffeine**

Caffeine is in energy drinks, coffee, tea, chocolate and cola. Encourage your child to avoid these things in the late afternoon and evening, and don't offer them to him at this time.

## **11. Remove distractions – Make the bedroom a peaceful have for sleep:**

- Get dark curtains/shades in the bedroom where the child sleeps.
- Remove ALL radiation from the room, cell phones included to make children sleep peacefully.
- Don't watch TV in the bedroom where the child sleeps. Preferably, don't keep a T.V in the bedroom.
- Ensure that the mattress is not too soft or too hard. Very soft mattresses cause posture problems that may disturb your child's sleep.
- Even in summer, children do not enjoy a very cold room. Set the temperature of the room accordingly.

## **12. Make the connection**

- 10-15 minutes before bedtime, sit/lie down with your child or cradle him/her (for babies) and sing.

- Make sure that you choose a quiet corner of the house or it's just the two of you in the bedroom.
- Let/him her hum along if he/she likes.
- Sometimes, children ask questions or want you to explain the song to them. Softly answer them and then continue singing.
- Lullabies are soft melodious numbers and not tunes that will excite children further. You can ensure the tone of your voice is soft and relaxing.
- Don't change songs every few minutes or every day. Sing the same lullaby for a few days at a stretch.
- Children love repetitions! Here are a couple of famous lullabies you can sing:
  - Hindi: Chanda mama door ke.....
  - English: Rock -a-bye-baby, on the treetop, when the wind blows, the cradle will rock..... I'm sure you've heard of several lullabies in your mother tongue. Time to give them a shot!

**13. Make loo-time compulsory** – empty bladders reduce anxiety and put an end to nightmares!

**14. Read bedtime stories** – it ensures soothing and relaxing sleep. “Reading thrills ALL children.” Isn't this true?

### **Bedtime story routine**

- When it's bedtime and your other scheduled activities are done, tuck yourself and your child into bed, and read to him/her.
- Get your child to choose the story he/she would like to read—children as young as six months can choose a book for themselves.
- It can be the same story everyday or a new one of his/her liking. In either case, the focus should be on reading pleasant and positive stories and that aspect needs to be checked before buying books and not before reading them.
- Read softly and go easy on excessive animation. This will soothe and relax him/her and before bedtime.
- Most children have questions around the stories you read and you should answer them in soft and delicate tones. Also, don't go overboard with explanations since we're trying to relax their minds.
- Once the stories are over, you will notice a more relaxed child who will easily drift off to sleep. Mostly children fall off to sleep mid-story and that's as ideal as ideal can get. Isn't it?

### **Getting to sleep**

Most children fall asleep within 20 minutes of going to bed. How long it takes to get to sleep can depend on how sleepy your child's body is, and also on her daytime and bedtime routine. Some bedtime routines help your child wind down before bedtime, so she can fall asleep more easily.

## **Staying asleep**

During the night, your child cycles between light sleep, deep sleep and dream sleep.

Your child has most of his deep sleep during the first few hours after falling asleep. During the second half of the night, his sleep consists of light sleep and dream sleep.

Your child wakes briefly as she cycles between light and dream sleep, but she might not be aware of being awake. To stay asleep, your child needs to be able to fall back to sleep by herself after these brief waking episodes.

## **When worries affect your child's sleep**

If your child has worries and anxieties that stop him from relaxing at bedtime, there are a couple of things you can do.

If there's a quick and easy answer to your child's problem, you can deal with it straight away. For example, 'Yes, you can have Radhika over to play on the weekend even though Dadima is staying with us'.

But if the problem needs more time, it's probably best to acknowledge your child's feelings and gently plan to sort things out in the morning. For example, 'I understand that you're worried about whether you can run the flat race at the sports day next week. Let's talk about it in the morning and work out what to do'.

We all know parenting=sleeplessness, but then its our choice and we love doing this...isn't it?

**A Very Happy Festive Season And Happy Parenting!**

**Anupama Chand**