

Parent / Carer Information

Sleep (older children)

Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to help parents and carers to understand more about sleep for their child or teenager. Sleep is important for growth and physical health as well as concentration, memory and mood. The term 'sleep hygiene' means the habits that help people to sleep well at all ages. However, when we sleep and how many hours we sleep changes a lot over time. There is a big range of what is normal for children and teenagers to sleep, but these are the average number of hours needed.

Healthy sleep duration

Age: 6-13 years	9-12 hours
Age: 13-18 years	8-10 hours
Age: 18 + years	8-9 hours

Routine

Before puberty, it is normal for children to wake before the adults in the house. As teenagers go through the final stages of puberty, there are changes to the body clock (circadian rhythm) that sets the time when they are most likely to fall asleep. With teenagers, there is a natural tendency to fall asleep later, closer to 11pm or midnight, often later than older adults. There is also an increased need for sleep during the final growth spurt, so sleep can be a bit longer. A regular routine will still help good sleep but a very early start for school or college will be difficult for a teenager.

- Try to keep wake up times on school days and weekends to within two hours of each other to help keep their body clock regular. For example, if they have to get up at 7am on weekdays to get ready for school, they should get up around 9am at the weekend.
- Try to ensure they get **out** of bed in the morning, rather than staying in the bed itself.
- Do more relaxing activities in the hour before lights out, rather than last minute school work or other stimulating activities.

Food and drink

It is helpful to avoid caffeinated drinks in the afternoon and before bedtime. Caffeine stays in the body for many hours, so energy drinks, tea, coffee, or cola drinks will make it harder to fall asleep. Try to limit caffeinated drinks to fewer than two per day and avoid them in the afternoon and evening.

Exercise

Out-of-breath activity during the day really helps children and teenagers sleep. It will help them burn off energy and feel tired at the end of the day. Children who have been inactive may have difficulty falling asleep. Exercising very close to bedtime can stop children falling asleep quickly, but at any other time of the day it makes sleep deeper, with fewer night-time awakenings. Encouraging your child to get as much natural light as possible during the day is also good for sleep. It clearly signals the day and the night for the brain.

Environment and technology

Your child's bedroom should be a place where they can relax and feel safe. The temperature and noise level should be comfortable. Some children prefer a nightlight and others like total darkness.

Electronic devices should not be used just before bedtime as they can prevent children and teenagers from settling to sleep. Teenage brains are very sensitive to light, which can make the time they fall asleep even later. Ideally, electronic devices should be left in a shared family space overnight when everyone is in bed. It will help if this is set as a rule for the family.

Worries and anxiety

If they have worries that keep them awake, try to talk about them together during the day when there is a quiet time. For younger children, write down anxious thoughts well before bedtime and they could try to add a possible solution.

For further information

Contact details

PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) for help, advice and information about NHS services. You can contact them on freephone 0800 032 02 02, e-mail northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk or text to 0781 550 0015.

Useful websites

BASIS <https://www.basionline.org.uk>

The children's sleep society <https://www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk/leaflets.php>

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