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Sleeping Behaviors for Children

“By the age of two, most children have spent more time asleep than awake and overall, a child will spend 40 percent of their childhood asleep. Sleep is especially important for children as it directly impacts mental and physical development.” – Sleep for Kids



Sleep is incredibly important for the healthy growth and development of children and adolescents. Sleeping behaviors and patterns are different from different ages: newborns must sleep much more than school age children, and school age children must sleep more than adults. Sleep for Kids, a Service of the National Sleep Foundation, provides helpful information on the habits of sleep for children based on age and developmental stage shown below.

Newborns (1-2 months old)

Newborns must get between 10.5 to 18 hours of sleep per day. Newborns have not been able to develop a sleep cycle yet, which is why they often sleep and wake up at many different times throughout the day. When sleeping, newborns are often very active, and it is normal for they to twitch their limbs, make facial expressions, and move. Newborns have to learn how to sleep at night and stay awake in the day time, so it is encouraged to try to get newborns used to play during the day and be quieter and more relaxed at night. Some other sleep tips for newborns include:

* Observe baby's sleep patterns and identify signs of sleepiness.
* Put baby in the crib when drowsy, not asleep.
* Place baby to sleep on his/her back with face and head clear of blankets and other soft items.
* Encourage nighttime sleep.

Infants (3-11 months old)

Infants will begin to need less sleep than newborns, about 9-12 hours per night with daytime naps, and while many infants can sleep through the night by 6 months, 70-80% will do so by 9 months. To help infants learn how to help themselves get back to sleep, one method is to put infants to bed when tired but not fully asleep. This way, infants can learn how to fall asleep on their own, rather than with a lot of help from their parents, so they know how to fall back asleep if they wake up in the middle of the night. Other tips include:

* Develop regular daytime and bedtime schedules.
* Create a consistent and enjoyable bedtime routine.
* Establish a regular “sleep friendly” environment.
* Encourage baby to fall asleep independently and to become a “self-soother.
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Toddlers (1-3 years old)

Toddlers need about 12-14 hours of sleep in a 24 hour period. Once daily naps can still occur, but it is recommended to not have them too close to bedtime. Toddlers can also have increased difficulties sleeping through the night because of their abilities to get out of bed on their own, having problems being separated from parents, and having nightmares. Some tips to help toddlers sleep include:

* Maintain a daily sleep schedule and consistent bedtime routine.
* Make the bedroom environment the same every night and throughout the night.
* Encourage use of a security object such as a blanket or stuffed animal.

Preschoolers (3-5 year olds)

Preschoolers normally sleep about 11-13 hours a day, and most do not nap anymore after 5 years of age. It is normal to preschoolers, as with toddlers, to have trouble falling asleep and many wake up during the night. The development of preschooler’s imagination also leads to increases in nightmares and night terrors. Sleep tips for preschoolers include:

* Maintain a regular and consistent sleep schedule.
* Have a relaxing bedtime routine that ends in the room where the child sleeps.
* Child should sleep in the same sleeping environment every night, in a room that is cool, quiet and dark – and without a TV.

School Aged Children (5-12 years old)

School aged children need about 10-11 hours of sleep per night, which can be difficult for many children to get because of increased time demands from school, homework, after school activities, and family activities. Sleeping disorders are common at this age range because of lots of things going on in children’s lives, along with the increase in use of TV, computer, phones, etc. Lack of proper sleep can also cause behavior problems in children and adolescents, such as mood swings, behavioral problems, and issues learning and paying attention in school. Some sleep tips for adolescents and children are:

* Teach school-aged children about healthy sleep habits.
* Continue to emphasize need for regular and consistent sleep schedule and bedtime routine.
* Make child's bedroom conducive to sleep – dark, cool and quiet. Keep TV and computers out of the bedroom.
* Avoid caffeine.

Nightly Bedtime Routine

One of best ways to get children into good sleep habit is establishing a bedtime routine. An example of a healthy, effective bedtime routine from Sleep for Kids is:

1. Have a light snack
2. Take a bath.
3. Put on pajamas.
4. Brush teeth.
5. Read a story.
6. Make sure the room is quiet and at a comfortable temperature.
7. Put your child to bed.
8. Say goodnight and leave.

Additional Information and Resources Available at: <http://www.sleepforkids.org>