

Sleep Hygiene for Children

Sleep hygiene is a variety of different practices that are necessary to have normal, quality nighttime sleep and full daytime alertness. The most important sleep hygiene measure is to maintain a regular sleep and wake pattern seven days a week. It is also important to spend an appropriate amount of time in bed, not too little, or too excessive. Children should spend a minimum of 8 hours in bed, and a maximum of 10 hours in bed. In addition, good sleep hygiene practices include:

- Keep consistent bedtimes and wake times every day of the week. Late nights or sleeping-in on weekends can throw off a sleep schedule for days.
- Melatonin is a hormone naturally produced by the brain that plays a role in sleep. Taking up to 3mg, 30 - 60 minutes before desired bedtime may help with a disrupted sleep pattern.
- Your child's bedroom should be cool, quiet, and comfortable. There should not be any "screens" (phone, tablets, video console, televisions, computers) in the bedroom.
- Bedtime should follow a predictable sequence of events, such as bath time, brushing teeth, and reading.
- Avoid high stimulation activities just before bed, such as watching television, playing videogames, or rowdy play or exercise. If there are nighttime awakenings, these same activities should be avoided.
- Physical exercise as a part of the day often helps with sleep time many hours later.
- Relaxation techniques such as performing deep, slow abdominal breaths or imagining positive scenes like being on a beach can help a child relax.
- Avoid caffeine (soda, chocolate) in the afternoons and evenings. Your child's sleep can be impacted by any caffeine at all at any time of day. Even if caffeine does not prevent falling asleep, it can still lead to shallow sleep or frequent awakenings.
- Worry time should not be at bedtime. Children with this problem can try having a "worry time" scheduled earlier when they are encouraged to discuss or write down their worries with a parent and then put them aside.
- If your child is unable to fall asleep within 30-45 minutes, you can try a temporary delay of bedtime by 15-30 minutes, so that he or she experiences falling asleep more quickly once they get into the bed. The bedtime should then be gradually advanced earlier until the desired bedtime is reached.
- Keep a sleep diary with naps, sleep and wake times and activities to help you find patterns and problem areas to target. This can be very helpful when discussing sleep challenges with your care team.