

Seven Tips for Improving Children's Sleep

Has your child's sleep been disrupted? Regaining a healthy sleep pattern should be fairly easy. Here are a few easy-to-use ideas to help improve your child's sleep. Choose 3 to 4 that you can use in combination.

- 1) Use Bedtime Routines.** Prepare for sleep 60 to 90 minutes before sleep. You should have a predictable and regular bedtime routine, including the same time and the same sequence of activities. As you move through the routine, remind your child that they are relaxing to get ready for sleep.
- 2) Create a Relaxing Environment and Make Time to Unwind.** Take time to unwind before bedtime. A relaxing environment can include soft lighting, gentle music, scented sprays or oils (scent is a powerful trigger for memory and can help induce a relaxation response if you associate a particular scent with being relaxed).
- 3) Remove highly stimulating toys and electronics from the bedroom.**
- 4) Avoid Blue-wave light.** All screens emit blue-wave light that disrupts the body's natural circadian rhythm. This delays the release of melatonin so 1) you don't feel sleepy until you are exhausted, and 2) sleep quality is poor. Your circadian rhythm is disrupted. Avoid screens and bright light 2 hours before bed. LED lights tend to emit more blue-wave than fluorescent bulbs. Dim red lights are best.

TIP: Orange glasses that block this light can help at night. UVEX Skyper (SCT Orange Lens) Blue Light Blocking has been researched.



- 5) Use Relaxation Soundtracks.** These fall into two categories. First are soothing nature sounds such as waves or water, bird or animal sounds (often with music). Second are those with a voice that guides you through a relaxation process such as visualization and imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, or self-hypnosis.
- 6) Regular Exercise.** People who are physically active tend to sleep better than those who are not. The best is regular exercise that gives your heart-lung system a work-out. Aim for 150 minutes of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity a week.
- 7) Try Melatonin.** Melatonin is a hormone your body produces naturally. Your body then releases it in the evening to help you feel sleepy. Since melatonin is a natural substance, it rarely has side effects. It typically works within 30 minutes, so you should take it just before bed or just after going to bed. It can be purchased at the pharmacy, but you should a) *talk to your GP or pediatrician first*, and b) *ask the pharmacist about brand and dose, especially if your child is on other medications, or has a unique health condition.*



Don't Toss and Turn for Too Long. Most experts recommend that if the child is still awake 30-60 minutes after they have gone to bed, they should probably not stay there. They need to associate the bed with sleep and not with restlessness. The child should get up and try a few more suggestions on the list to help induce relaxation. *If the youth's sleep pattern is really poor and does not improve, consult with a specialist such as your family doctor, pediatrician, psychologist, or sleep clinic.*



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