



How Much Sleep do Children Need?

Excerpts from Web MD (<http://www.webmd.com/>)

“Your parents are tired – go to bed!” Sound familiar? Loss of sleep can affect children, resulting in lower school performance, irritability, verbal fights with family members, and similar problems.

How much sleep do children need? The amount of sleep a child needs varies depending on the individual and certain factors, including the age of the child. Following are some general guidelines:

3-6 Years Old: 10-12 hours per day

Children at this age typically go to bed between 7 and 9 p.m. and wake up around 6 and 8 a.m., just as they did when they were younger. At 3, most children are still napping, while at 5, most are not. Naps gradually become shorter as well. New sleep problems do not usually develop after 3 years of age.

7-12 Years Old: 10-11 hours per day

At these ages, with social, school, and family activities, bedtimes gradually become later and later, with most 12 year olds going to bed at about 9 p.m. There is still a wide range of bedtimes, from 7:30 to 10 p.m., as well as total sleep times, from 9 to 12 hours, although the average is only about 9 hours.

12-18 Years Old: 8-9 hours per day

Sleep needs remain just as vital to health and well-being for teenagers as when they were younger. It turns out that many teenagers actually may need more sleep than in previous years. Now, however, social pressures conspire against getting the proper amount and quality of sleep.

How Bedtime Snacks Can Help Your Child Sleep

Excerpts from Web MD (<http://www.webmd.com/>)

New research suggests the habit of not eating before bedtime may be a factor in the inability to fall asleep. "The connection between what we eat and how we sleep is only just taking shape," says

Antonio Culebras, MD, neurology professor at the State University of New York Upstate Medical University in Syracuse.

This relatively new research focuses on leptin and ghrelin, two metabolic hormones that scientists discovered only during the last decade. When we eat, leptin signals that the body is satisfied, while ghrelin stimulates hunger. Researchers speculate that if we have enough leptin to suppress the secretion of ghrelin, we'll sleep through the night without awakening to eat. "If the balance is thrown out of order," says Culebras, "it may result in subtle signs that awaken us."

To achieve this hormonal balance, children may find eating a light snack before bedtime helpful in getting to sleep. But some rules apply. First, eat only a light snack, not a heavy meal. The digestive system slows down while you sleep, so eating too much can make you uncomfortable

Second, carbohydrate-rich snacks may be best, because these foods likely increase the level of sleep-inducing tryptophan in the blood. Protein, on the other hand, is more difficult to digest. Good choices include a small bowl of cereal and milk, a cookie, toast, or a small muffin, says Culebras. Beware of foods containing caffeine, including less obvious choices such as certain sodas and chocolate, even decaffeinated beverages. Keep in mind the child's relative weight – being overweight may cause sleep problems or make them worse.

Tips to Help Your Child Sleep Well

Excerpts from Web MD (<http://www.webmd.com/>)

- Set up a bedtime routine to help your child get ready for bed and sleep. For example, read together, cuddle, and listen to soft music for 15 to 30 minutes before you turn out the lights. Do things in the same order each night so your child knows what to expect.
- Have your child go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning.
- Keep your child's bedroom quiet, dark or dimly lit, and cool.
- Limit activities that stimulate your child, such as playing and watching television, in the hours closer to bedtime.
- Limit drinking near bedtime.
- If your child wakes up and calls for you in the middle of the night, make your response the same each time. Offer quick comfort, but then leave the room.
- Help prevent nightmares by controlling what your child watches on TV.
- Have your child take medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if your child has any problems with his or her medicine.
- Do not try to wake your child during a night terror. Instead, reassure and hold your child to prevent injury.
- If your child sleepwalks, keep the windows and doors locked during sleep time.
- If your child is overweight, set goals for managing your child's weight. Being overweight can cause sleep problems or make them worse.

Helping your teen sleep well

Excerpts from Web MD (<http://www.webmd.com/>)

- Talk to your teen about why it's important to go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning.

- If your teen is going to bed at a very late hour, teach him or her how to change bedtime a little at a time. Suggest that your teen go to bed 15 minutes earlier each night until the best bedtime is reached.
- Have your teen keep his or her bedroom quiet, dark, and cool at bedtime. You may need to remove the TV, computer, telephone, or electronic games from your teen's room.
- Encourage your teen to manage his or her homework load. This can prevent the need to study all night before a test or stay up late to do homework.
- If a teen has trouble waking up in the morning, ask what you can do to help:
 - Offer to wake him or her.
 - Offer to check to make sure your teen got up when the alarm went off.
 - Offer to turn on a bright light in the room when it's time to get up.
- Teach your teen to limit eating and drinking near bedtime. Don't serve caffeine (found in colas, coffee, tea, and chocolate) after 3 p.m.
- If your teen is overweight, set goals for managing his or her weight gain. Being overweight can be linked with sleep problems.