



Child (ren's) or Young Person's Sleep Hygiene

Sleep disruption is common, especially during times when you may feel emotionally stressed. Anxiety, relentless replaying of the day's events, and heightened emotions may significantly interfere with children's sleep.

Lack of sleep robs you of needed rest, making self-control of children's emotions and behaviour more difficult. Bringing sleep patterns under control and working at a consistent, stable pattern is critical to children's health and well-being. Adequate rest is a necessity, not a luxury.

The most common cause of insomnia is a change in daily routine. For example: traveling, change in work/school hours, disruption of routine behaviours (eating, exercise, down-time, etc.), and relationship conflicts may cause sleep problems. Paying attention to sleep hygiene is the most important thing you can do to resume a good sleep pattern.

What is sleep hygiene?

Bedroom environment and habits (behaviours) during the day, as well as habits before child (ren's) or young person go to bed, all play a role in how well they sleep.

'Sleep hygiene' is the term used to describe healthy habits that you can practice during the day to help you get a good night's sleep.

Why is good sleep hygiene important?

Sleep is essential for child (ren's) or young person's physical and mental wellbeing. It allows their body time to recharge and their mind to process information. Without enough quality sleep, their brains are unable to function properly.

Good sleep hygiene can help improve child (ren's) or young person's sleep quality, which in turn can:

- improve child (ren's) or young person's mood
- improve child (ren's) or young person's concentration and memory
- prevent child (ren's) or young person's from developing sleep disorders (such as insomnia)
- help children maintain a healthy weight
- lower child (ren's) or young person's risk of developing serious health conditions (such as diabetes and heart disease)
- help child (ren's) or young person's body fight off diseases

What are the signs of poor sleep hygiene?

If child (ren's) or young persons have poor sleep hygiene, they may:

- find it difficult to fall asleep
- wake up several times during the night
- feel tired during the day

How can I improve my sleep hygiene?

We have included some simple lifestyle changes below. Child (ren's) or young persons can make these changes during the day and just before they go to bed to help improve their sleep hygiene, which will help them get the best possible night's sleep.

Keep regular sleep hours

Going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time every day (including on weekends and free days) will help regulate child (ren's) or young person's body clock and will train their body to rest and remain alert at certain times of the day.

Do:

1. Child (ren's) or young persons should go to bed at the same time each day.
2. Get up from bed at the same time each day.
3. Get regular exercise each day, preferably in the morning. There is a good evidence that regular exercise improves restful sleep.
4. Get regular exposure to outdoor or bright lights, especially in the late afternoon and winter.
5. Keep the temperature in children's bedroom comfortable.
6. Keep the bedroom dark enough to facilitate sleep.
7. Keep the bedroom quiet and peaceful when sleeping.
8. Use children's bed only for sleep.
9. Keep T.V.s, cell phones, and tablets out of the bedroom so they cannot be easily accessed at night.
10. Take medications as directed. It is often helpful to take prescribed sleeping medication 30-60 minutes before bedtime so they are causing drowsiness by the time you lie down.
11. Use a relaxation exercise just before going to sleep (relaxation recordings can be used for this purpose).
12. Keep child (ren's) feet and hands warm; it's okay to wear socks and/or mittens to bed if needed.
13. Eat a small amount before bedtime so that you are not woken by hunger during the night. A small turkey sandwich or a glass of warm milk is a good choice.
14. Get up out of bed and read or listen to soothing music for a few minutes if you cannot get to sleep after 30 minutes.

Don't:

1. Don't exercise within an hour of going to bed.
2. Don't engage in stimulating activity (e.g. playing a competitive game, watching an exciting program on a screen, listening to exciting music) within an hour of going to bed.
3. Don't try to fall asleep while watching T.V., tablet, or phone.
4. Don't eat or drink items containing caffeine (coffee, soda, chocolate, non-herbal teas).
5. Don't drink alcohol to help you sleep.
6. Don't take another person's sleeping medication.
7. Don't go to bed too hungry or too full.
8. Don't take over-the-counter sleeping medications without children's doctor's knowledge. Some of these can be habit forming or interact with other medications.
9. Don't take naps during the day or sleep too late into the morning.
10. Don't try to force children to go to sleep. This tends to make children's mind more alert and children's body more restless.

Create a restful bedroom environment

Parents/Carers can do this by:

- keeping the child (ren's) or young person's room temperature at a comfortable level (a very warm room is more likely to disrupt their sleep)
- keeping the room as dark as possible
- keeping the room as quiet as possible or using earplugs

Stop using electronic devices before going to bed

This includes computers, smartphones and televisions, as they can all stimulate children's brain for several hours after use, making falling asleep difficult.

Young Person to avoid stimulants after lunch

Caffeine can take up to six hours to wear off, so avoid anything containing caffeine after 2pm. This includes coffee, tea, energy drinks and chocolate.

Nicotine is a stimulant and will keep you awake, so young person should avoid smoking before going to bed.

Alcohol may make them feel drowsy, but it does not improve sleep quality and will make the young person need the toilet more often than usual, which will disrupt their sleep. Young person should avoid drinking alcohol before going to bed and try not to rely on it to help them fall asleep.

Eat a light meal before going to bed

Going to bed too full can force child (ren's) or young person's digestive system to keep working when it should be resting. Likewise, going to bed hungry can also disturb children's sleep.

Exercise regularly during the day

Exercising during the day can help child (ren's) or young persons have a better night's sleep. However, vigorous exercise within three hours of going to bed may delay young person's sleep. Young person try doing a relaxing exercise before going to bed to help them sleep, such as yoga.

Get regular exposure to natural light

Morning and early afternoon light exposure will help child (ren's) or young persons to maintain a healthy sleep-wake cycle. Too much light exposure in the evening can prevent them from feeling sleepy.

Create a relaxing bedtime routine

When child (ren's) or young persons are stressed or anxious, their body produces more cortisol (the stress hormone). Give children's one to one and a half hours to wind down before going to sleep. Try meditating or having a warm bath before going to bed.

Limit or avoid taking naps during the day

Staying awake during the day will make child (ren's) or young person's more likely to fall asleep at night. Taking a nap late afternoon or in the evening is likely to affect the quality of child (ren's) night-time sleep. If they do take a daytime nap, this should be no more than 30 minutes.

Don't force child (ren's) or young person's self to try to go to sleep

This is likely to make them more alert. Parent/Carer to remove or hide any clocks from their view so they are not constantly checking the time.

- If they are unable to sleep within 30 minutes of going to bed, get up, go to a different room and do something relaxing for a short while (avoid anything with bright lights).
- Parent/carer to return to child (ren's) bedroom when they feel sleepy.
- Repeat this as many times as necessary during the night.

The key to good sleep hygiene is consistency. Parent/carer to find out what tips work best for them and create child (ren's) or young person's own sleep hygiene checklist to help them get the best sleep possible each night.

How much sleep do I need?

There is no set rule as to how much sleep you need. The amount of sleep needed varies from person to person.

Useful Links

- <https://sleepaction.org/>
- Call our National Sleep Helpline – **03303 530 541** and speak to trained sleep advisors who can offer some practical advice
- Sleep support for a child aged 13 upwards Teen Sleep Hub – teensleephub.org.uk
- The Sleep Charity website – thesleepcharity.org.uk

