

Sleep – How it affects your child's brain

Better sleep can lead to improvements at home and school

"Sleep is important for brain health in general," says Alice Ann Holland, Ph.D., ABPP, a neuropsychologist and the Research Director of the Neuropsychology Service at Children's HealthSM. Without enough sleep, certain jobs of the brain may not work as well as it should.

In addition to their emotions, Dr. Holland says poor sleep can affect their memory and make it more difficult for your child to learn. Children who don't sleep enough or well may also be less alert and more easily distracted. This puts teens who are driving at a higher risk for accidents.

How much sleep does your child need?

Each child has their own sleep needs. There are guidelines though, based on age, that can help.

We offer these guidelines, from the American Academy of Pediatricians. They will help you know about how much sleep your child may need, based on their age:

- **Newborns:** 14-17 hours each day
- **Infants (4-11 months):** 12-16 hours (including naps) of sleep each
- **Toddler (1-2 years):** 11-13 hours (including naps) every day
- **Pre-schoolers (3-5 years):** 10-13 hours (including naps) every day
- **School-aged children (6-12 years):** 9-12 hours of sleep every day
- **Teens:** 8-10 hours every day

These guidelines are meant to promote health in kids, giving their growing brains and bodies time to recharge.

After you put your child to bed, you don't always know if they are sleeping the whole time though. They may wake up in the middle of the night, have trouble falling asleep, or getting back to sleep.

How to help your child get enough sleep

If you think your child isn't getting enough sleep, to talk to them about their sleep. Ask how often they have trouble going to sleep quickly? How often they wake up in the middle of the night and do they have problems getting back to sleep?

Younger children may not be able to answer these questions. You can check in on them before you go to bed or set up a monitor in their room. These might help you see if your child has any problems sleeping.

If your child is having trouble falling asleep, try the following tips to help them rest better:

1. **Move up bedtime.** Set your child's bedtime earlier to help them fall asleep when they should.

2. **Make a routine.** Follow a regular bedtime routine. This could be taking a bath, brushing teeth, and then reading for a little while. A routine can be calming for children and can help their body feel ready for sleep.
3. **Avoid screen time before bedtime.** Lights from screens (TVs, computers, phones and tablets) about 2 hours before bedtime make it harder to go to sleep.
4. **Set up their room as much as you can.** The right sleep setting can help your child fall and stay asleep. Your child's bedroom should be:
5. **Dark,** with only one dim nightlight if needed
6. **Cool.** Set the temperature of your house to be cooler at night, if you can
7. **Quiet,** with only a small amount of white noise (e.g., a fan), if needed
8. **Screen-free,** including TV, phones, computers and tablets
9. **No late-night treats.** A bedtime snack or drink could be keeping your child from falling sleep. Foods high in sugar 2-3 hours before bedtime make it more difficult to go to sleep. Don't let them drink anything with caffeine in it 6 hours before bedtime. This includes many sodas, coffee, tea and chocolate milk.

Learn more

If your child has trouble sleeping, talk to your pediatrician or a sleep specialist. The Children's Health Sleep Disorders Center is the largest program in North Texas accredited by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. Learn more about our sleep program, which treats all forms of pediatric and adolescent sleep disorders.