

“Good Night, Sleep Tight”: Promoting good sleep habits in your child and adolescent

Sleep is an important topic affecting your child’s and adolescent’s health. Sleep is vital for growth, mental health and a healthy immune system. Signs of sleep deprivation can include inattentiveness, mood swings and fatigue. Unfortunately, sleep is something that many children do not get enough of. It is important despite the many demands of school and other activities to make sleep a priority for your family.

So, how much sleep is enough? Sleep needs can vary from person to person, however most children and adolescents need anywhere from 8-13 hours of sleep. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following amount of sleep for your child:

3-5 years: 10-13 hours (including naps)

6-12 years: 9-12 hours

13-18 years: 8-10 hours

How to promote good sleep habits:

Comfortable sleep environment: Promoting a good night sleep starts with a comfortable sleep environment. A child’s bedroom should be quiet, mostly dark (aside from a night light if needed) and a comfortable temperature (ideally 70-75 degrees). Please do not allow TVs, computers or smart phones in your child’s room. These can be very distracting at bedtime and lead to restless sleep patterns and difficulty falling asleep.

Consistent sleep schedule and bedtime routine: Do your best to maintain a consistent bedtime for your child even on the weekend. Bedtime routines aid in your child’s ability to fall asleep easily, stay asleep and feel rested the next day. Approximately 60 minutes prior to bedtime you should plan to turn off all electronics (TVs, computers, tablets, phones). Good bedtime routines can include activities such as bathing, brushing teeth, drawing/coloring or reading a book quietly. Dimming the lights in the hour or two leading up to bedtime can promote drowsiness as well. Not all children will fall asleep quickly, but with time and consistent routine you can aid in that process.

Avoidance of caffeine: It is recommended that your child avoid caffeine, however if caffeine is being consumed by your child it should be eliminated in the late afternoon and evening to avoid interfering with sleep. Caffeine is found in coffee, soda, energy drinks, some teas and chocolate.

Encourage exercise daily: Sports, physical activity and free play outdoors are very beneficial in promoting good sleep habits. Encourage your child to participate in 60 minutes of these activities daily.

Be aware that snoring, snorting or gasping during sleep can be a symptom of an underlying sleep disorder. Make sure to discuss this with your child’s primary care provider if you notice these signs in your child or adolescent.

In the long run, sticking to these habits can help promote a happier, healthier child. Despite likely protests from your child during the process, be patient and consistent and it will be worth it!