



Children and Sleep

Sleep Habits

Beginning in infancy children learn how to eat, sleep and think. And though these are natural skills children learn to form either healthy or unhealthy habits in these areas.

Creating Healthy Sleep Habits

For all the protests and resistance children genuinely want and thrive on routines. Healthy routines create a safe rhythm and normalcy for many of life's needs.

It helps a child to have a regular and predictable bed time. The internal rhythms and timing are established more easily when the sleep/wake schedule is more or less regular.

Guidelines:

- Infants can begin to learn that there are special places for sleep.
- Infants can begin to learn how to fall asleep themselves.
- By six months many babies can sleep through the night.
- Establish a regular schedule of sleep, naps and eating.
- Use reading, rocking and soothing behaviors to help a child get ready for sleep but **not** to put them to sleep. We don't want a child to become dependent on rocking etc. to actually fall asleep.
- Make bed time a special time but keep it brief and allow children to fall asleep on their own.
- As children grow try your best to resist the temptation to be impatient and angry when trying to maintain the bed time schedule. Try not to let sleep-time become a battle ground.

Children's Sleep Problems

From infancy through the teenage years children and adolescents are developing physically, cognitively and emotionally. Sleep provides an essential ingredient in this complicated process.

At the same time children are in the process of establishing habits and attitudes around sleep. As these dynamic aspects of development progress children often exhibit various and sometimes alarming sleep-related symptoms.

The following symptoms are common, often normal and benign but also potentially serious. Only your doctor and preferably a sleep doctor can know for certain.

- Trouble falling asleep and/or staying asleep
- Colic
- Rhythmic movements
- Early Awakenings
- Nightmares
- Sleep terrors
- Sleep walking
- Bed wetting
- Restless legs
- Snoring
- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- Bedtimes that seem either too late or too early

Sleep Guidelines:

- Infants: need 16 hours
- Ages 3 to 6: need 10 to 12 hours
- Ages 6 to 9: need 10 hours
- Ages 9 to 12: need 9 hours
- Teenagers: need 9 to 10 hours
- Adults need 7 to 9 hours
- Older adults: need 7 to 8 hours
- Pregnant women: need a few additional hours beyond their ordinary need

The Mystery of Children's Sleep

A child's sleep often seems mysterious because of the dynamic and changing nature of growth and development.

If you have any questions about your child's sleep seek out answers immediately.

There are sleep doctors that specialize in pediatric sleep.

It is as important to feel reassured when a symptom is harmless as it is to find and address a genuine problem.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is it normal for a child to have difficulties with sleeping?

A: Yes. Recent polls indicate that more than two thirds of children experience one or more sleep problems a few nights per week.

Q: Are children's sleeping difficulties always sleep-disorders?

A: No, in fact the task of helping a child to establish healthy sleep-routines often takes planning, time and patience. Some sleep problems become apparent during the process of establishing and reinforcing routines.

Q: My child snores. Is it possible for a child to have obstructive sleep apnea?

A: It is very common for children age 2 to 6 years to have sleep apnea due to enlarged tonsils. A child who snores should be seen by a sleep specialist.

Q: Is it possible for a child to have insomnia?

A: Yes a child can have insomnia. Like adults, children can also have insomnia associated with another sleep disorder or with stresses, environmental causes or medication influences.

Q: Can children have restless leg syndrome?

A: Yes. A sleep specialist can diagnose and treat childhood restless leg syndrome.

Q: Are behaviors like sleep walking and nightmares a normal occurrence in children?

A: It is thought that **most but not all** of these *parasomnias* arise as part of the normal development of a child's brain.

A sleep specialist can make a proper diagnosis.

Q: How many teenagers are getting the recommended amount of sleep?

A: One recent national survey says 20% and another says only 8%.

Q: Are younger children getting enough sleep?

A: Recent national surveys tell us that children from birth through fifth grade are getting from 1 1/2 to 2 hours less sleep per night than recommended.

For further information about our Sleep Coaching services please email sleepcoach@compeap.com or call 1-800-344-1011