

# EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT KIDS AND SLEEP

Every living thing needs sleep. This is especially true for kids. But what is the right amount of sleep for a kid? Why is sleep so important? What can a parent do to help set the stage for a good night's sleep for their kid? The answers to these questions and more in Everything You Wanted to Know about Kids and Sleep.

## **Question: How much sleep should my elementary school child be getting every night?**

It is recommended by the National Sleep Foundation that children between the ages of 5-12 get 10 to 11 hours of sleep every night. This time does not include the time needed to go through a 'pre-sleep' routine (we'll talk more about that later on). So if your kid needs to be awake at 7:00 am and they need 10 hours of sleep + 30 minutes to get them ready for bed, you need to start the bedtime routine at 8:30 pm the night before. While there may be individual differences in how much sleep a kid requires, aim for more sleep, not less.



## **Question: Wow! That seems like a lot of sleep. Why is it important for a child to get that much sleep? What's going on?**

A lot of people think that during sleep the body and mind are shutting down. Not true! During sleep is when your body and mind are doing important things to get ready for the next day.

In the Body	In the Brain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Blood is going into the muscles and tendons to help them grow &amp; repair</li><li>• Energy levels are being restored</li><li>• Hormones that balance the appetite are being produced</li><li>• Hormones that help with growth and development are being released</li><li>• The immune system is getting rid of germs, viruses and bacteria</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Everything learned in the daytime (short term memory) is being turned into long term memory so you'll remember it</li><li>• Chemicals in the brain that help with good mood are being restored</li><li>• Chemicals that help with learning, being alert, and making good decisions are getting back to best levels</li></ul>

In a nutshell, the body and brain are doing everything they need to do to make sure a kid can do it all again tomorrow!



## **Question: What's the downside of my kid not getting enough sleep?**

There are many negative effects of not getting enough sleep. They include not being able to concentrate, mood swings, feeling irritable and crabby, hyperactivity, cognitive problems that can affect learning, getting sick more often, not being able to make good decisions, feeling depressed, weight gain (caused by increased cortisol), and lower physical performance.

Can you see how not enough sleep makes it difficult for a kid to feel good and do well in school?

**Question: I'm convinced! What can I do to help my kid get a good night's sleep?**

Establish a regular 'pre-sleep' routine. These are the things that will signal to the kid that it's time to sleep and that need to get done before going to sleep. In order for it to be a routine it must happen at the same time every night and all the steps should be done every time. Remember that the time it takes to complete the 'pre-sleep' routine is added on to the total hours of sleep needed.

If you want your kid to be in bed at 8:30 pm, at 7:30 pm a 'pre-sleep' routine might include.



1. Turning off the TV, Ipad, iPhone, and any electronic device.
2. Have a light snack (only if they're hungry).
3. Take a bath.
4. Put on pajamas.
5. Brush teeth.
6. Read a story.
7. Make sure the room is dark (a night light is okay if not too bright), quiet, and at a comfortable temperature (cool, not cold is best).
8. Put your child to bed.
9. Say goodnight, give hugs and kisses, and leave.

What a great way to start catching some Zzzz's and having sweet dreams!

**Question: Do I have to keep up the 'pre-sleep' routine on weekends?**

Even on weekends parents should keep up with the 'pre-sleep' routine. You can extend the kid's bedtime by a little bit (less than an hour). If you completely throw out the routine on weekends it's just going to make it that much harder to get back into it come Sunday night.

**Question: Are there things I shouldn't do that could interfere with my kid's sleep?**

These are some don'ts that should be avoided at all costs.

- Don't have your kid share a bed (if possible). Sleeping with Mom & Dad or another person means more chances to being woken up and not getting enough sleep.
- Don't let your kid have caffeine, a lot of sugar, or a large meal right before bed. All of these will make it harder to fall asleep and/or stay asleep.
- Don't let kids watch TV or play with electronic things (IPads, iPhones, Leap Pads, video games, etc.) at least 1 hour before bed time. Studies have shown that kids who watch TV or play with electronic things don't go to bed as easily, have difficulty falling asleep, are more likely to have nightmares, and have a lower quality of sleep.
- Don't enter your kid's room if they wake up in the night unless they are sick or having an emergency. Let them fall back asleep on their own.

**Question: Are there times I should be concerned about my child's sleep?**

Yes. If your kid snores, has extreme nightmares (night terrors), sleep walks, wakes up frequently in the middle of the night, or falls asleep during the day even with a good night's sleep it's time to talk to a doctor. These could be signs of a medical disorder that only a doctor can treat.

