

What can help to  
get my child to bed?



**PRACTICAL  
STRATEGIES TO HELP  
WITH BEDTIME**

## Why is sleep important?

Sleep is vital for wellbeing. A sleep deprived child cannot meet their full potential and it can impact on their mental, physical and emotional health.

Young people who get adequate sleep are more likely to:

- Be mentally alert
- Meet their full potential
- Concentrate in school
- Feel calmer
- Have a stronger immune system
- Release hormones appropriately at night to support their growth and weight
- And much more!

## How much sleep do children need?

- How much sleep a child needs depends on their age.
- It is important to consider what time bedtime should be and then work backwards.
- If you want to bring bedtime forward to an earlier time, gradually move the time forward a few minutes each night over a number of weeks.

Below are the approximate hours of sleep needed by children of different ages, as recommended by the Millpond Children's Sleep Clinic.

### Children aged 0 to 5 years

Age	Daytime	Night time
1 week	8 hours	8 hours 30 minutes
4 weeks	6 to 7 hours	8 to 9 hours
3 months	4 to 5 hours.	10 to 11 hours
6 months	3 hours	11 hours
9 months	2 hours 30 minutes	11 hours
12 months	2 hours 30 minutes	11 hours
2 years	1 hour 30 minutes	11 hours 30 minutes
3 years	0 to 45 minutes	11 hours 30 minutes to 12
4 years		11 hours 30 minutes
5 years		11 hours

### Children aged 6 to 16 years

Age	Daytime	Night time
6 years		10 hours 45 minutes
7 years		10 hours 30 minutes
8 years		10 hours 15 minutes
9 years		10 hours
10 years		9 hours 45 minutes
11 years		9 hours 30 minutes

## Top Tips for Bedtime

- Introduce good bedtime habits
- Use a visual routine
- Create a comfortable sleep environment
- Limit the use of electronics/screens before bed
- Help your child feel relaxed before bed
- Use a Sleep diary to look for patterns

## Introducing good bedtime habits

- Stick to a set bedtime. Encourage regular sleep and wake up times - even at the weekend!
- Prepare children for bedtime: Start a countdown reminding them bedtime is approaching
- Get ready for bed in the same order e.g., bath, pyjamas, tooth brushing, toilet. You can use a visual bedtime routine to help your child
- Encourage your child to go to sleep in their own bed, don't let them fall asleep in another bed/place and then transfer them
- Praise your child at bedtime for what they are doing well

Remember it takes children time to learn a new routine. It is important to remain consistent and following through with any changes, allowing time (at least two weeks) before seeing improvements.

# Visual bedtime routine

Lots of children benefit from using visual routines to help them understand what will happen next. Visuals can help reduce children's anxieties around bedtime and make things more predictable. Here are some visuals to help create a bedtime routine.

Bedtime Routine



Sometimes have a bath



Put on pajamas



Brush teeth



Read a bedtime story



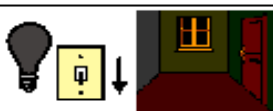
Kiss and hug  
goodnight



Get tucked in



Lights out



Sleep



## **Creating a comfortable sleep environment**



The bedroom environment plays an important role in getting a good night's sleep.

Your child's bedroom should ideally be dark, quiet and tidy. It should be well ventilated and kept at a temperature of about 18 to 22C.

Dim the lights and close the curtains. A dark environment can help with melatonin production. A blackout blind can be helpful to block out any sunlight.

If children find a completely dark room distressing or disorientating, then using a soft glowing night light that can be safely left on all night may be helpful.

Never use the bedroom or an early bedtime as a behavioural consequence for children, sleep should be promoted positively.

## **Limit the use of electronics/screens before bed**

Electronics, such as tablets, I pads, smartphones, TVs, video game consoles, computers screens and LED lights omit a form of blue light. Exposure to blue light can have unique effects on our body's level of alertness, hormone production, and sleep cycles.



## **How does blue light effect sleep?**

We all have an internal biological clock which helps to regulate the timing of bodily processes, including circadian rhythms (24 hour cycles). One of the most important and well-known circadian rhythms is the sleep-wake cycle. Light plays an important role in aligning circadian rhythms and for much of human history these rhythms were closely aligned with sunrise and sunset. While all types of visible light can affect circadian rhythms, blue light has the largest impact.

When using electronics/screens in the evening children are exposed to increasing amounts of blue light. Blue light stimulates the parts of the brain that make us feel alert, and suppresses our body's release of the hormone melatonin. Melatonin is the hormone needed to make us feel sleepy. Exposure to blue light close to bedtime can trick our brain into thinking it is still daytime, leaving us feeling alert instead of tired.

Therefore, decreasing exposure to light, particularly blue light in the evening is important to help your child's body naturally prepare for sleep.

## **Limiting the Effects of Blue Light**

The most effective way to reduce exposure to blue light in the evening is to simply turn off the source. This could be dimming or reducing LED lighting and turning off electronic devices.

If you are unable to switch off electronics in the evening, here are a few other ideas to reduce your child's exposure to blue light:

- Make it a routine. Agree to turn off electronics 1 to 2 hours before bedtime.
- Dim the brightness on electronic devices or turn to "night mode" if they have this option.
- Try an app. If you need to use devices in the evening, there are several smartphone and computer apps that can help reduce blue light emission.



# Relaxation tips to help aid sleep

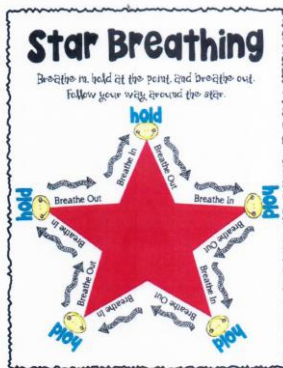


Doing the same relaxing things in the same order and at the same time each night helps promote good sleep:

- Set aside a time earlier in the day to allow your child to share any worries with you. Try to avoid any discussion around worries before bedtime. It can be helpful to share how their day has been and what is planned for the next day. Make sure to give them your full attention.
- A warm (not hot) bath could help your child relax and get ready for sleep. However, if your child does not like a bath or becomes overexcited, it is best to avoid before bedtime. Ideally a bath should take place 1 hour before sleep, as it is the increase followed by the slow decrease in body temperature which aids relaxation and the promotion of sleep.
- Older children might enjoy incorporating the use of a warm cloth on their face, applying moisturiser/creams and massaging into their face, arms and hands as part of a relaxing night time routine
- Keeping lights dim will encourage your child's body to produce the sleep hormone, melatonin.
- Once they are in bed, encourage your child to read quietly or listen to some relaxing music, or

read a story together. You could encourage older children to make a play list of their favourite relaxing music.

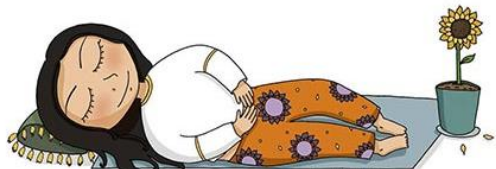
- Mindfulness can help promote relaxation and sleep. Support your child to concentrate on their breathing, by practicing different breathing techniques together. For older children there are a number of apps and products available to help them learn and practice a range of different mindful techniques
- Teach your child to progressively relax the muscles in their body. Explain they can begin by tensing their feet to the count of 5 and then letting them relax. Next tense the calf muscles and relax, moving up to the thighs and so on until they have relaxed each part of their body. This is another good activity to do together.



### PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

@psychologistrebecca

- ① TAKE A FEW DEEP BREATHS TO RELAX.
- ② BREATHE IN. TENSE THE MUSCLES OF YOUR FEET.
- ③ BREATHE OUT. RELEASE THE TENSION IN YOUR FEET.
- ④ BREATHE IN. TENSE YOUR CALF MUSCLES.
- ⑤ BREATHE OUT. RELEASE THE TENSION IN YOUR CALVES.
- ⑥ WORK YOUR WAY UP YOUR BODY. TENSE EACH MUSCLE GROUP.  
THIS INCLUDES YOUR LEGS, CHEST, FINGERS, ARMS, NECK & FACE.



## **Keeping a sleep diary**

It is common for children to experience disturbed sleep from time to time. Sleep diaries can be helpful in identifying reasons why your child is not sleeping.

For instance, it might identify if there's difficulty going to sleep on a Sunday night because of anxiety about school. They can also help us to identify factors which may have contributed to the promotion of a good night's sleep. Sleep diaries can be used to record patterns and gather information should you want to discuss your child's sleep with a GP or health professional.

### **Tips for using a sleep diary**

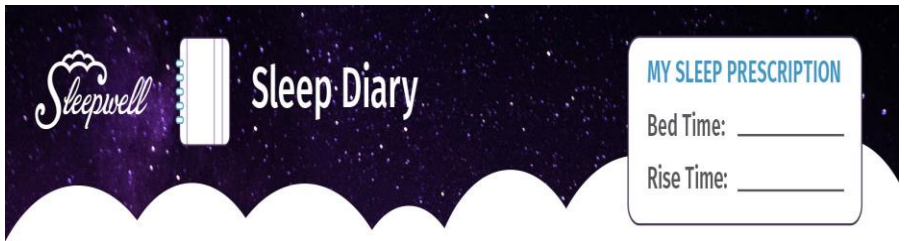
- Complete it honestly - there is no judgement!
- Keep for 2 weeks to look for patterns
- Keep by the bed to make it easier to fill in. It can be hard to remember details the next day.
- If your child sleeps elsewhere e.g. other parent, grandparents or respite make sure they fill it in too
- Don't use it if it feels overwhelming

### **Things to record in a sleep diary**

- The average number of hours sleep per night
- How long it is taking to fall asleep
- The length of bedtime routine
- How your child is going to sleep e.g. with a parent, downstairs etc.
- Do they seem sleep deprived e.g. lethargic next day, emotional, hyperactive?
- Time they wake each morning
- Any different patterns at weekends?

- What helped to promote a good night's sleep?
- How you are feeling?

## Example Sleep Dairy



DAY OF THE WEEK							
DATE							
<b>Q1</b> What time did you go to bed?							
<b>Q2</b> What time did you try to go to sleep?							
<b>Q3</b> What time did you fall asleep?							
<b>Q4</b> How many times did you wake up during the night?							
<b>Q5</b> In total, how long did these awakenings last (minutes)?							
<b>Q6</b> What time was your final awakening?							
<b>Q7</b> What time did you get out of bed to start your day?							
<b>Q8</b> Note anything that interfered with your sleep							



### End of week calculations

Easy calculations at [mysleepwell.ca/calculator](http://mysleepwell.ca/calculator)

My sleep duration (typical night): \_\_\_\_\_ My sleep efficiency (typical night): \_\_\_\_\_

## Dealing with common sleep issues

Considering what may be causing a sleep issue helps identify the most appropriate strategy to address it.

- Try to avoid any discussion around worries before bedtime. Keep any talk around worries to earlier in the day
- Make sure your child has the opportunity to engage in de-stressing activities during the day - exercise, listening to calming music, colouring, or walking the dog
- Try doing some relaxation, guided visualisations, yoga, breathing exercises, or stretching together with your child in the run-up to bedtime. This will help to get rid of stress and tension in the body
- Stay calm yourself at bedtime, this will help your child to relax. Acknowledge how you are feeling and remember it is OK to ask another supportive person for help with the bedtime routine.
- Practice! It may take time to find the right activity that helps your child relax - what works for one child does not always work for another

It may help to discuss your concerns with an appropriate professional such as your health visitor, school nurse or GP.

For further advice and information please refer to the RISE NI regional pagetiger site:

<https://view.pagetiger.com/RISENI/parents>