



Sleep Advice

Sleep Patterns

Most people wake between 4-5 times per night. This is normal. As a rule we do not remember this. If the environment around us has changed (e.g. the light was on and now is off, parents were in the bed and now aren't or the child fell asleep somewhere else and is now in their own bed) we are more likely to fully wake up.

Good Sleep Routines

These are important as they help cue a child into the fact it is soon bedtime and it helps them to 'wind down'. There should be a definite end point to the routine so your child associates this with falling asleep.

- Develop a consistent calming routine before bedtime with quiet activities at the same time every night.
- Make sure the TV or any electronics are switched off at least an hour before bedtime as the blue light in them blocks the sleep hormone (Melatonin).
- Calcium based drinks and snacks can help sleep e.g. milk, yoghurt, porridge.
- Quiet fine motor activities can help children wind down for sleep.
- In the hour before bed have a bath or a cuddle in a warm towel or blanket. avoid bath time before bed if it is a stressful experience for your child.
- Ensure you get ready for bed in the same order e.g. pyjamas on, milk, tooth brushing, toilet.
- Reading stories, relaxation music or story tapes are good relaxing things to do in the immediate run up to going to bed.
- End the routine the same way each night e.g. a kiss and cuddle and say "goodnight".
- Wake the child at the same time every morning to help strengthen their body clock.

If you want to introduce a sleep routine, the following things are important to consider:

- Choose a time when life is settled. Holidays are not the best time.
- Your child may resist the routine initially as it is new, so their sleep pattern may worsen.

- Try the routine for at least 2 weeks.
- Be realistic about what can be achieved. Make small, feasible changes.
- Be consistent.

Things to try to avoid

- Drinks/foods containing caffeine, e.g. coffee, tea, coke, chocolate.
- High sugar foods and drinks.
- Some squashes can act as a diuretic, e.g. blackcurrant. If your child is urinating frequently you may want to change the squash they have.
- Stimulating activities, e.g. television, computers, mobile phones, I-pads, for an hour before bedtime.
- Bringing your child back to the living area once their bedtime routine has come to an end or allowing them to fall asleep elsewhere and then transferring them to their bed
- Sending them to their bedroom as a punishment. It needs to be a calm and happy place for your child to feel relaxed in.

If your child is used to falling asleep with you with them the following advice may be helpful:

- Sit beside your child when they are in bed. Do not interact with them. Stay with them until they fall asleep.
- Gradually increase the distance between you and your child each night whilst you wait for them to fall asleep until you are able to leave the room.
- Consider giving them something that smells of you e.g. one of your t-shirts over their pillow, a teddy of theirs you have cuddled or a photo of you.
- If your child cries or throws a tantrum when left, leave them for a set amount of time e.g. 3 minutes. Go in, check they are alright, put them back into bed with minimal interaction, say it is time to go to sleep (or choose a similar phrase) and leave.
- Gradually increase the time you leave them for or have a set time e.g. go in every 20 minutes.

If your child wakes at night the following advice may be helpful:

- They may kick their bedding off and wake because they are cold/hot. Try a sleeping bag or tucking their duvet/sheets in around them.
- If your child gets out of bed, take them back calmly and with minimal interaction. Repeat each time they get up; they need to know they will get the same response each time from every adult who is in the house.
- Try to avoid taking them to the toilet/going downstairs/giving them a drink, as they may learn to expect this each time they wake.
- Some children need help understanding when it is night and when it is OK to get up. Try using something like a day/night clock to help them.
- Move their bedtime to later. Some children do not need as much sleep as others.
- If your child wakes at the same time each night, stir them 30 minutes before, (do not wake them fully) and let them go back to sleep. Continue this every night until they sleep right through and then try a night where you do not wake them.

- Try to avoid too many toys in their bedroom as this can be exciting and stimulating when a child wakes in the night.
- Reward your child in the morning if they stay in bed all night.

If your child doesn't go to sleep until much later than they need to, the following advice may be helpful

- Put your child to bed at the time they usually fall asleep, so they go to sleep quickly and more easily.
- Gradually move the time of bedtime back e.g. by 5, 10, 15 minutes until you reach the time you want them to be going to sleep

Useful Resources:

The Children's Sleep Charity

Website: <https://www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk/>

Phone Number: [01302 751 416](tel:01302751416)

Email: info@thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk