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Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Aneurin Bevan
University Health Board

Sleep

Children and adults have differencing sleep needs. A baby starts life needing 16 hours or so of sleep each day, and the time we need for sleep decreases as we get older. People's needs vary: most people feel they need 7-8 hours but others feel they need 9-10 hours a night.



Signs of Difficulty

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We might have difficulty getting off to sleep• Wake up frequently during the night, or wake early in the morning and not get back to sleep | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling tired and tense• Worrying about not sleeping• Poor concentration |
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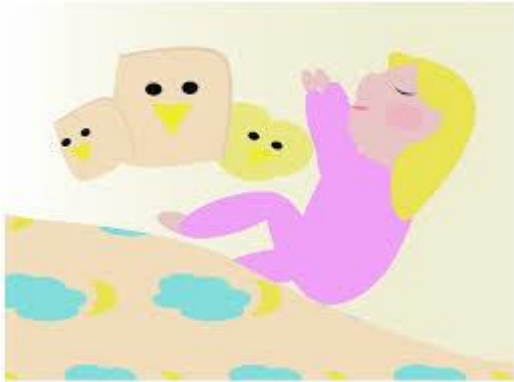
Activities/Strategies

- Think about what types of fabric your child likes, i.e. brushed cotton, fleece or flannel. Experiment with the type of pyjamas, some children prefer soft loose night garments, others want tightfitting legging style ones. Wearing soft socks in bed provides gentle compressions to the feet and avoids sensitive feet rubbing on sheets.
- Toddlers might like the security to know that mum and dad are close. Allow them to sleep with one of your t-shirts or jumpers for familiarity and a comforting smell.
- Cut out labels if they irritate the skin: some children find this hard to tolerate which may be stopping them from falling asleep.
- Making a nest: Some children like to feel cocooned, so going to sleep in a big bed can be daunting. Allow them to pile up teddies and soft cushions around them, as long as it doesn't interfere with being able to breath.
- **Weight and compression** – Try using extra blankets over the duvet for the falling asleep phase that have some weight. These can help promote relaxation and sleep. Some children liked to be tucked into a sleeping bag, or tucked into sheets and blankets.



- Weighted equipment (e.g. weighted blankets) should only be used after heavier throws and blankets have been tried first to determine if the weight is beneficial to your child. Weighted equipment should be removed from the bed after the child has fallen asleep to prevent danger of suffocation and reduce the risk of the child becoming acclimatised to the weight.
- **Noise and light** – some children prefer to sleep with a fan on a low setting. The soft hum can help to drown out background noise from the house, and help with winding down. Listening to relaxation music is another alternative. Avoid nursely rhymes and popular songs with lyrics if you don't want them to be singing along.
- When light levels are low it stimulates the release of melatonin, a natural chemical in the brain which helps induce sleep. In the summer draw the curtains and use blackout blinds for half an hour or so before the child goes to bed. In the winter you could put lamps on in the lounge, avoiding putting on the main light.
- Do not let your child have any access to electronic devices for at least an hour before bed (preferably longer). Research has proven that the blue light emitted from these devices can stimulate the brain for several hours after exposure and has a detrimental effect on a child's ability to sleep.
- The amount of light in the bedroom is a very personal preference. Black out curtains might work for some but others will need some light for security. A soft red or orange glow promotes sleep so if using a night light make sure it is not too bright. Replacing the light bulb in the night light with a red or orange Christmas light bulb is the easiest solution (check voltage and suitability first), or you could use a Gro egg which gives off an orange light.
- **Routine** – Follow the same routines every evening. Sometimes it's helpful to have a photo strip with the different tasks in order. This can help mentally prepare a child for bed.
- **Separate sleeping and playing areas** - If at all possible keep the bedroom just for sleeping and relaxing. If space is an issue, physically divide the room to create a play area and a sleeping area. Lock all toys away for the night so they are no longer visible.
- **Eating and Drinking** – A balanced diet which limits intake of sugary and processed foods will help aid sleep. Avoid sugary drinks before bedtime, and be careful of artificial flavours. It is best to avoid drinking just before bed as your child is then likely to need the toilet which will disturb their sleep. *If a drink is required an hour before bed, use a curly straw to drink as it can provide resistance and help to slow down the overall system.*
- **Exercise and Movement** – make sure your child had enough exercise during the day. It can be difficult to fall asleep after a day of sitting around. As a general rule of thumb, do not let them exercise too late in the afternoon or evening as this may alert your child.
- **Relaxation time** and lots of Proprioception – Have some rest at least an hour before bed. Switch off the TV, iPad and phone. Reading or listening to a story,

some calm music or an audio book. If old enough they can try some box breathing (you can google the technique) or muscle relaxation. Massaging your child's legs or feet can help to relax the mind and body.



Further Advice

- www.cerebra.org.uk – This charity have some excellent resources on their website around sleep difficulties, that includes advice for all children and a section for children with special needs.
- www.parentingscience.com – Contains general advice about sleeping.

Occupational Therapy Service for Children and Young People
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