

## HEALTHY SLEEP HABITS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

1. Keep consistent bedtimes and wake times every day of the week. Late weekend nights and/or sleeping in can disrupt a sleep schedule for days.
2. Avoid spending a lot of non-sleep time in bed – spending hours lying on a bed doing other activities before bedtime keeps our brains from associating the bed with sleep.
3. Your child’s bedroom should be cool, quiet, dark, and comfortable. Those children who stare at clocks should have clocks turned away from them or removed.
4. Bedtime should follow a predictable sequence of events, such as brushing teeth and reading a story. Children should have “wind down” time prior to bedtime, but this should not involve visual stimuli from screens (TV, computers, videogames, etc.)
5. Avoid high stimulation activities just before bed, such as watching television, playing videogames, or exercising. Do not do these things during a nighttime awakening either. Children should not have access to videogames, televisions, or telephones in their bedroom at night. (Phone companies usually allow parents to set allowed hours for texting and phoning.)
6. Having physical exercise as part of the daily routine often helps with sleep time many hours later.
7. Relaxation techniques such as performing deep, slow abdominal breaths or imagining positive scenes, like being on a beach, can help a child relax.
8. Avoid caffeine (soda, energy drinks, chocolate, tea, coffee) in the afternoons/evenings. Even if caffeine doesn’t prevent falling asleep, it can still lead to shallow sleep or frequent awakenings.
9. If your child is awake in bed tossing and turning, it is better for them to get out of bed to engage in a low stimulation activity (i.e., reading), then return to bed later. This keeps the bed from becoming associated with sleeplessness. If still awake after 20-30 minutes, spend another 20 minutes out of bed before lying down again.
10. Worry time should not be at bedtime. Children with this problem can try having a “worry time” scheduled earlier when they are encouraged to think and talk about their worries with a parent.
11. Children should be put to bed drowsy, but still awake. Letting them fall asleep other places forms habits that are difficult to break.
12. Security objects at bedtime are often helpful for children who need a transition to feel safe and secure when their parent is not present. Try to include a doll, toy or blanket when you cuddle or comfort your child, which may help them adopt the object.
13. When checking on your child at night, make sure these are “brief and boring.” The purpose is to reassure your child you are present and that they are okay.
14. If your child is never drowsy at the planned bedtime, you can try a temporary delay of bedtime by 30 minute increments until they appear sleepy, so that they experience falling asleep more quickly once they get in bed. The bedtime should then be gradually advanced earlier until the desired bedtime is reached.
15. Keep a sleep diary to keep track of naps, sleep times, and activities to find patterns and target problem areas when things are not working.

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*Also, check out the book, Take Charge of Your Child’s Sleep by J.Mindell MD and J. Owens MD*