

How Much Sleep Does My Child Need?

Adequate sleep is essential to health and wellness. Sleep-deprivation in children has been shown to have significant negative impacts on daytime behaviors including inattentiveness, irritability, behavioral problems, decreased memory and increased stress and depression in adolescents. In addition, studies have shown that students who lack adequate sleep have poorer social skills and decreased academic performance. Insomnia often begins in childhood and persists into adulthood.

So, how many hours of sleep should a child have each day? On average, infants (to age 18 months) require 14-18 hours; preschoolers and kindergarteners need 11-12 hours; school aged children (ages 6 to 12) need 10-11 hours and adolescents need 9.25 hours (Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota).

The amount of time that a child is in bed is only part of the equation. In order to get the quality of sleep needed, children have to be taught good sleeping habits early on. This is known as "sleep hygiene" and requires that even as early as 6 months of age, children are able to master the ability to self-soothe and fall asleep (or back to sleep) without parental interventions such as rocking, feeding or sleeping with the child. In addition, the environment needs to be conducive to restful sleep. To provide this environment parents should:

- Establish a regular sleep schedule for their child that takes into account the number of hours that is recommended for their child's age.
- Allow enough "down" time before bed to improve relaxation and allow for positive bedtime routines such as reading
- Discontinue all screen time (i.e. television, computers, phones, text-messaging or any other electronic device) at least an hour before bedtime **AND KEEP THESE DEVICES OUT OF THE BEDROOM.**
- Make sure that their child avoids foods that contain caffeine
- Keep the bedroom dark and cool. Expose their child to morning light whenever possible

Once healthy sleep habits are established, both children and their parents will awake refreshed and restored. However, if in spite of the parents' best efforts, the child continues to have sleep issues, it is important to consult with the primary health care provider.