

Healthy Sleep Habits for Older Children and Teens

Sleep is important at all ages. Sleep problems are common among many children and teens and can affect their focus while at school, work, or home. Not enough sleep (sleep deprivation) can also affect their mood, behavior, emotional health, and weight. Almost one-fourth of all children have some type of sleep problem. Poor sleep habits are often to blame. But sometimes the cause is a medical condition.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that children get the following amount of sleep every day:

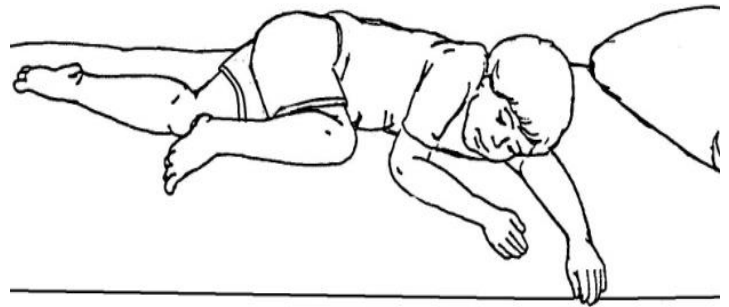
- Gradeschoolers 6 to 12 years get 9 to 12 hours
- Teens aged 13 to 18 get 8 to 10 hours.

As a child gets older and reaches puberty, sleep patterns may change. Your child may want to sleep longer in the mornings and stay awake later at night, even though the time needed to wake up for school does not change.

What to do

- Make it a family priority to get enough sleep. Set clear limits, such as what time lights must be turned off.
- Have a bedtime routine.
 - Do relaxing things to help wind down, like taking a bath, listening to music, or reading a book.
 - Create a soothing environment. Make sure the room is not too cold or too hot and dim the lights. It is okay to use a nightlight.
 - Spend some special time with your child before turning the lights off. Stick to topics that will not upset him or her.
 - Set an alarm clock for the morning wake-up time.

- Keep a regular sleep schedule. Your child should try to go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends. If he likes to sleep later on the weekends, he should wake up within 2 hours of the weekday wake-up time. For example, if his wake-up time is at 7 AM during the week, then the weekend wake-up time should be no later than 9 AM.
- Your child should avoid daytime naps. Napping during the day can make it harder to fall asleep at night.
- Keep your child active during the day but avoid strenuous exercise before bedtime. Try not to schedule too many activities, especially at night.
- Your child should avoid drinks with caffeine, such as sodas, energy drinks, coffee and tea, especially in the afternoon and evenings.
- Avoid a big meal before bedtime but your child should not go to bed hungry. A light snack before bed is a good idea.
- Use beds only for sleep. Do not allow eating or watching TV in bed (Picture 1). If needed, completely remove the TV from the bedroom.
- Turn off any device with a lighted screen, such as cell phones, electronic games, and the computer, at least one hour before bedtime. The light from the screens can cause sleep problems that will keep your child awake.
- Teach him to go to sleep when he is sleepy before he gets a “second wind.”



Picture 1 Use the bed only for sleeping.

If your child cannot fall asleep after lying in bed for 20 minutes, have him get out of bed and do something until he feels sleepy. It may take up to 2 weeks to see results from these changes. So, do not give up in the first week!

When to call your doctor

Call your doctor or the Nationwide Children's Hospital Sleep Clinic at 614-722-4613 if:

- Sleep problems continue even after you follow the tips above.
- Your child snores or has pauses in breathing when sleeping.
- Your child is excessively drowsy or unexpectedly falls asleep during the day.
- Your child's behavior and success in school changes due to lack of sleep.
- You have any other questions or concerns.