

Quotes

*Inadequate sleep can cause decreases in:
performance, concentration, reaction times, consolidation of information, and learning.*

*Inadequate sleep can cause increases in:
memory lapses, accidents and injuries, behavior problems, and mood problems.*

– National Institute of Health

*Sleep does indeed matter. It helps school performance, learning and memory.
Children hear all the time that they need to eat healthy and be active. Getting a good
night's sleep is just as important as diet and good nutrition.*

– Dr. Carl Hunt, Director of the National Center on Sleep Disorders

Notes

Many children today are not getting enough sleep. Most doctors recommend that children get nine or ten hours of sleep, and if they don't, their school performance suffers and their behavior worsens. During the past few years at the school in which I serve as a counselor, I have noticed numerous kindergarteners and first graders being sent to our "timeout" room for misbehaving. A good number of them sit in the quiet room for a few minutes and then fall in to a deep sleep. No wonder they struggle; they aren't getting enough sleep! Older students have sleep problems as well. Research finds that the natural biological tendency for most teens is to stay up late at night and wake up later in the morning, which is in stark contrast to our regular school schedule. No wonder many middle and high school students "nod off" during the school day.

Most parents will say that they do send their children to bed on time, but what we are discovering is that children are often so wound-up from watching television or playing video games that it takes them a long time to get to sleep. In his book, *The Progress Paradox*, Gregg Easterbrook writes, "Those who watch television until lights-out tend to have less sleep than those who engage in a quiet activity, because television is full of choppy images, flashes, explosions, shouting, crying, gunplay, superficial sexuality, adversity both real and simulated. Viewing such disquieting material before nodding off prevents the mind from calming fully for sleep, and may inspire nightmares." So, little Jenny may go to bed at nine, but not fall asleep until eleven o'clock!

SLEEP ISSUES

Strategies

1. The hour before bedtime needs to be calm. Children need to unwind. Limit the use of television, computers, and video games before going to their rooms. Encourage children to relax, read, or listen to calming music.
2. Consider removing the television from your child's room.
3. Make sure adults turn down the television and use quiet voices after children go to bed.
4. Do not allow children to drink beverages with caffeine during and after dinner. Caffeine can stay in their system for 6-8 hours!
5. Make sure your child gets exercise every day. They need to get outdoors, run, ride their bikes, and play sports. Exercise promotes sleep.
6. Do not have critical discussions with your child before they go to bed. Discussions about punishment, family finances, chores, and marital problems will make it difficult for the child to fall asleep quickly.
7. Warm baths feel good and they calm the child before bedtime.
8. Do not keep the bedroom too warm. People tend to sleep better when it is cool.
9. Encourage children to have chores and homework completed within an hour of bedtime.
10. Some children find time in a rocking chair very calming before jumping into bed.
11. Consider placing a fish aquarium in the bedroom. The tank's light and bubbling sound is soothing.
12. Do not allow children to eat too much within 2-3 hours of bedtime.
13. Place a sound machine in their rooms. The sounds of a brook, stream, or ocean waves can be very calming.
14. Have them drink a cup of chamomile tea before going to bed. Chamomile is one of the safest medicinal herbs. It is a soothing, gentle relaxant and it has a satisfying, apple-like aroma and flavor.
15. Place a drop of lavender oil on the pillow.
16. Listen to grandma. Many older people still believe that a warm cup of milk with a touch of honey induces a good night's sleep.
17. Schedule an appointment with the child's doctor if sleeping problems become severe.
18. There are some people, including children, who seem not to need as much sleep as others. Dr. Mel Levine, professor of pediatrics at the University of North Carolina, reminds parents not to overreact and get too concerned if their children don't always get their ten hours of sleep every day. Levine notes, "Parents should not despair; some children with sleep-arousal imbalance may turn out to be the next generation of night people. They may compose cello sonatas at 2:00 am, work the night shift at the BMW plant, or host an all-night radio talk show. Regrettably, during childhood, tomorrow's night owls are condemned to attend school with all the day kids. We don't yet offer schools for night children."