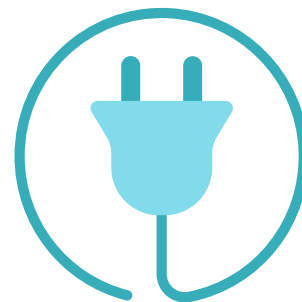


Why we need sleep - A guide for parents

Sleep is important for our physical and mental health. It allows our mind to digest and make sense of the day's events. Sleep prepares our brain for learning new things the next day. Simply put, getting the proper amount of sleep helps us cope better with whatever life brings our way.

Getting enough sleep is essential for our emotional health. You may start to feel out of sorts and like you are not yourself if you're not sleeping well. It can get harder to solve problems and we may experience more aches and pains, less energy, and less interest in life.



What happens if children do not get enough sleep?

They might find it harder to get along with other people, feel more irritable and have more arguments.

They might have trouble making good choices in school and at home.



They might have trouble paying attention, remembering things and get distracted easily.

They might be in a bad mood and get upset easily.

How much sleep should children get each night?

Generally these are the recommended amounts based on age, but they don't tell us everything!

Age	No. of hours (including naps)
4-12 months	12-16 hours
1-2 years	11-14 hours
3-5 years	10-13 hours
6-12 years	9-12 hours
13-18 years	8-10 hours

Some people can get 7 hours sleep and function very well

Other people can get 10 hours sleep and still feel tired out!

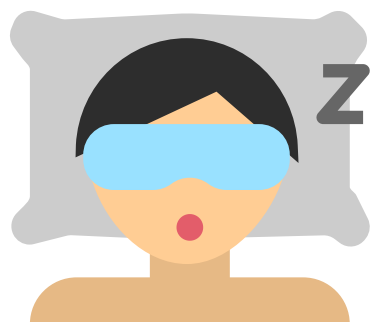


What does good sleep look like?

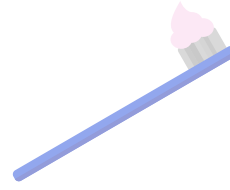
Good sleep might be a different amount for each person

Good sleep might mean waking up a couple of times

Good sleep is getting to sleep in about 20 - 30 minutes



Things that might stop children sleeping well



Having no or an inconsistent bedtime routine



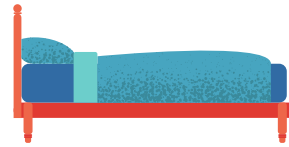
Eating starchy or fatty snacks before bed



Not winding down before bed



Bedroom too light or dark



Uncomfortable bed, bedding or sheets



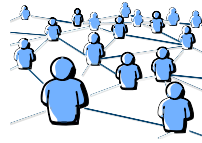
People arguing where they live



Being too full or hungry



Socialising until late



Using social media until late



Sharing a bedroom with siblings



Tests, exams and revision



Too much screen time before bed



Eating sugary snacks before bed



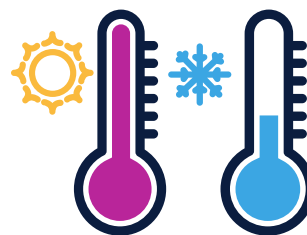
Exercising close to bedtime



Feeling worried or scared



Drinking caffeinated drinks



Being too hot or too cold



Becoming dehydrated during the night

What helps to get good sleep

Screen time

Watching or playing on anything with a screen before bed can make it hard to sleep. This is because, the light inhibits the production of melatonin in our brain. Melatonin is a chemical only released in the dark, which makes us feel sleepy.

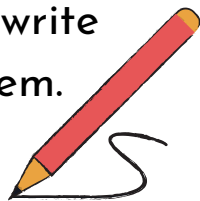


Children should turn off all our devices at least an hour before bed, or use a night mode on the device.

Feeling scared or worried

Encourage children to talk about their worries. Children can also write their worries down or draw them.

Children can find it difficult to sleep if they feel worried.



Eating and drinking the wrong things before bed can make it difficult to sleep.

Sleep can be disrupted if children feel hungry or too full. It's helpful for children to have a snack and drink before bedtime. However, sugary and starchy foods should be avoided. Dairy based foods and drinks are recommended.

Foods like: cheese and crackers or bananas are good bedtime snacks. Many children drink hot chocolates, which contain a lot of sugar. This could be replaced with hot milk.



What helps to get good sleep

Our brains and bodies need a sleep routine.

Sleep routines are very important for our circadian rhythms. This is our 24 body clock. It's easy to shift our body clock, which is why it's important for children to keep a bedtime routine (even on weekends).



Top tips for establishing a sleep routine!



1. Children should go to bed at the same time every night.
2. Children should try to wake up and get up at the same time every morning.
3. Children could have a bath before bed time to help them feel sleepy. This is as it gets the body to the optimal temperature for sleeping.
4. Doing some colouring or playing with a jigsaw can help children relax before bed. This is because these tasks involve fine motor skills, which helps us sleep better.



Different things will help different children to sleep better. Children should be encouraged to make their own lists for what helps.

Use this space to write down any changes your child could make to their sleep routine.

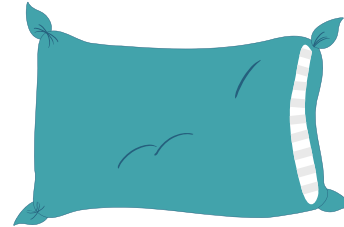
Conditions we need to sleep well

We all have sleep associations.

These are things we associate with sleep



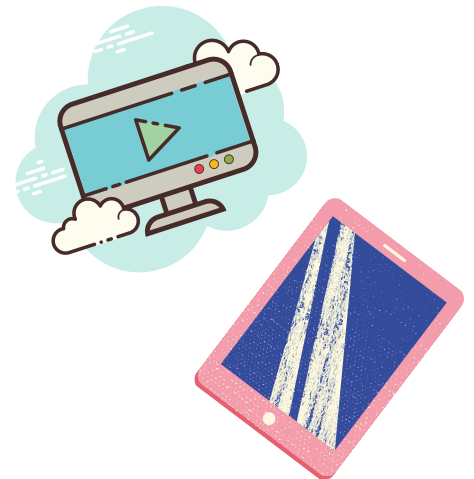
For the most part sleep associations are things we wouldn't identify as affecting our sleep. E.g. some people need a certain number of pillows, or a blanket covering their feet, or it to be dark!



These are usually not a problem. They help us get to sleep each night!

They become a problem when we have sleep associations that aren't constant all night long.

Some children (and adults) may have developed sleep associations with things like music, YouTube videos, TV, or a night light. These help them get to sleep initially. However, when someone in our house comes in and turns the TV or tablet off, that sleep association is no longer constant. We are then more likely to wake up throughout the night because the conditions we fell to sleep in are no longer present!



This is an important evolutionary mechanism designed to keep us safe from danger! The way this happens, is explained by the science of sleep!

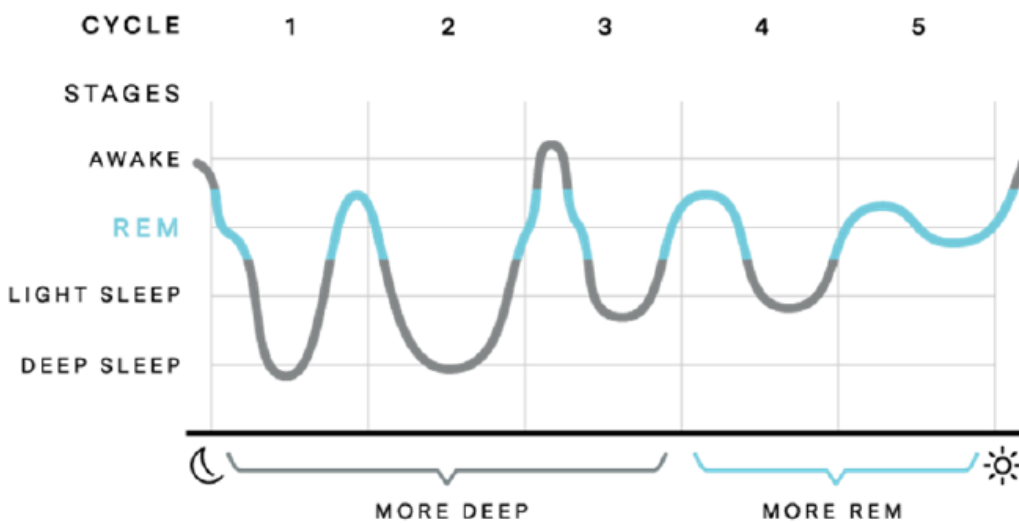
This makes it even more important for children to reduce screen time before bedtime.



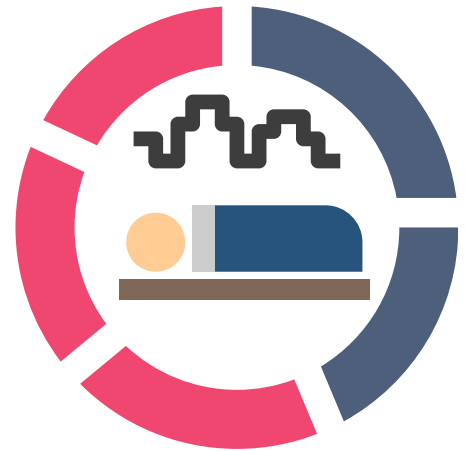
The science behind sleep

Have you ever wondered why you always wake up at a certain time in the night? Or why a noise wakes you up one night but not another? It's all to do with the [stages of sleep](#).

A TYPICAL NIGHT'S SLEEP



Each cycle of sleep lasts approximately 90 minutes and has different stages, which can be broadly explained as light and deep sleep. Separate to this is REM sleep.



During REM sleep, our brain waves look very similar to when we're awake and this is when we dream (and nourish our brain). When we talk about getting enough sleep during the night, **the amount of REM sleep is very important!**



It is really common for people to wake up between sleep cycles, this happens naturally.

However, we have a higher chance of waking up between sleep cycles if the conditions at the beginning of the sleep cycle are different compared to the end of it. For example, if we fall asleep with the TV on and then someone turns it off, we are more likely to wake up after that sleep cycle!



Thank you to our healthy minds champions who helped to produce this booklet!

Ideas for activities to do at home around sleep

Make a worry box with your child to put their worries in when they are trying to go to sleep.



Do a family sleep diary for a week to see how much sleep everyone gets each night.

Plan a sleep routine, with wind down time activities the hour leading up to bedtime.



Make a sleepy time playlist with your child to play whilst they're winding down for bed.

Write down any of your ideas here!

Websites and videos

The sleep charity has lots more information and ideas - <https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/>


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbYLFvg832M>

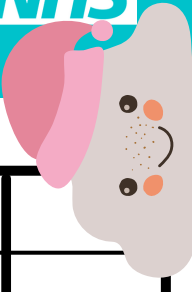
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoCL0IB4u4g> From 1:42-4:26



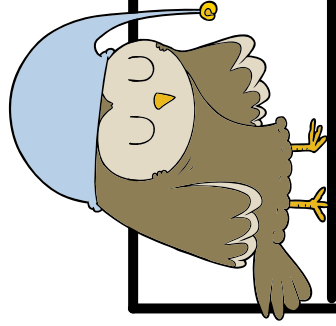
Family sleep diary example



	Time started to wind down				Time went to bed				Time went to sleep				Time got up next day				Number of hours asleep			
	Mum	Dad	Tom	Jess	Mum	Dad	Tom	Jess	Mum	Dad	Tom	Jess	Mum	Dad	Tom	Jess	Mum	Dad	Tom	Jess
 Monday	11	10	9	9	11	11	11	10	12	11	11	10	7	6	7	7	7	7	8	9
Tuesday	10	10	9	9	11	10	9	9	11	11	10	12	7	6	7	7	8	7	9	7
Wednesday	9	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	11	11	10	11	6	7	8	8	7	8	10	9
Thursday																				We forgot!
Friday	11	9	11	10	12	12	11	11	1	1	12	2	8	9	10	12	7	8	10	10
Saturday	10	10	10	10	12	1	11	12	12	1	12	12	10	10	10	11	10	9	11	11
Sunday	12	9	8	10	12	10	9	10	1	11	10	11	7	6	7	7	6	7	9	8



Family sleep diary



	Time started to wind down	Time went to bed	Time went to sleep	Time got up next day	Number of hours asleep
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					