

Sleeping skills

The NHS guidelines indicate that children should get the following amount of sleep:

Age	Amount of sleep needed
4 to 12 months old	12–16 hours including naps
1 to 2 years old	11–14 hours including naps
3–5 years old	10–13 hours including naps
6–12 years old	9–12 hours each night
13–18 years old	8–10 hours each night

We all know how important a good night's sleep is. It helps us recover from mental and physical exhaustion. Some children will fall asleep as soon as their head hits the pillow, while others battle to nod off. When a child doesn't sleep properly, it may mean they are tired and irritable the next day. If you have unsuccessfully tried the warm milk and bedtime story routine, here are a few things that can help your child get off to sleep.

What can I do during the day

Natural daylight

Open up the curtains in the house as everyone wakes. Get out into natural light as soon as you are able to in the morning, preferably around the same time every day. Natural light, which can still be effective on a cloudy or grey day, helps reset our internal body clock. It helps us get over feeling groggy when we have just woken up and can make us more alert.



Exercise

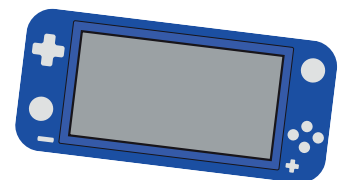
Exercise improves the quantity and quality of your sleep, making it deeper and more refreshing. Activities could include: vacuuming, digging, pushing a wheelbarrow or shopping trolley, walking to school, swimming, riding a bike, garden play and online home workouts.



Getting ready for bedtime

Limit screen time

Limit the use of television, computers, tablets, smart phones and games consoles or exposure to bright lights an hour or two before bedtime. Using electronics just before bed and in the bedroom can keep us awake for longer as the blue light from these devices can stop the hormones that make us sleepy from being made. Importantly, it is not just the light that can affect our sleep but most activities that we use our devices for can keep us awake and alert which we don't want to do at bedtime.



Diet

- Limit caffeine and other stimulants such as sugar, especially near bedtime
- Don't go to bed too full, hungry or thirsty
- Try not to drink too much close to bedtime, to limit the need for night time toilet trips
- Some foods such as whole-wheat bread, bananas, honey, warm milk, potatoes and turkey, are rich in melatonin, which help us to feel more sleepy. There are more examples in the websites which are linked at the end of the advice sheet. Consider meals or snacks that include some of these foods in the evening

Establishing a routine

A good bedtime routine is **essential**. Establish a basic, ordered routine for the evening, which can be followed anywhere. Doing the same things at the same time each night helps your child and their body know that it is bedtime. Using **visual timetables** can make it easier to follow. Use the bedtime routine as an opportunity to spend time together and read stories and/or sing songs. Keep things calm and relaxed.



Relaxation techniques

- ✔ **Essential oils:** adding a few drops of lavender oil to your child's bath or pillow has been shown to have a soothing effect
- ✔ **Giving your child a massage:** some children may find a gentle massage of the feet / hands / scalp or back helps for them to unwind and relax before bed. It can also help to relieve any aches or pains
- ✔ **Quiet time:** doing a quiet activity before bedtime, helps to wind down in preparation for bedtime
- ✔ **Yoga:** The Sleep Foundation suggest that yoga can improve sleep quality. If you want to work yoga into your bedtime routine, it's important to do the right kind. Some types of yoga can be energising which won't help you relax. Look for the restorative and relaxing ones
- ✔ **Busy brain:** give your child an opportunity to talk through any worries or events of the day to help with any emotions disrupting their ability to go to sleep. There are lots of different resources available to help parents with this such as mindfulness, books about understanding and dealing with emotions which are available online

At bedtime

Make the bedroom more comfortable:

- ✔ **Temperature and light:** making the bedroom a cool, dark, quiet place can really help with better quality sleep
- ✔ **Removing distractions:** consider any objects/toys in the bedroom which might act as a distraction, and try and move these out of sight
- ✔ **Snug as a bug:** some children enjoy being wrapped up for bedtime. Sheets can be tucked in tightly. Some children like to sleep in a sleeping bag. Some children prefer to have their bed positioned against a wall
- ✔ **Clothing:** Ensure your child is comfortable in what they wear to bed. Consider different types of fabric such a cotton or fleece, long or short sleeves, shorts / trousers or night dresses, socks and pants, are they a tight or a loose fit
- ✔ **Sleep apps:** Consider using a sleep app, the NHS recommends Pzizz, but there are many others available on the internet



Sleep apps

- ✔ **Pzizz** – Recommended by NHS.uk, this app is perfect for those who have trouble sleeping, especially if a 'racing mind' is to blame. Using voiceover narrations based on clinical sleep interventions and specially designed music, Pzizz helps quiet the mind and calm the body into deep rest. The app also offers an alarm that gently brings the user out of their sleep

References:

NHS (2020) 'Healthy Sleep Tips for Children'. Available from www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/healthy-sleep-tips-for-children/
NHS(2020) 'Sleep Tips for Teenagers'. Available from www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/sleep-tips-for-teenagers/
Sleep Foundation (2021) "How Can Yoga Improve Your Sleep?". Available from www.sleepfoundation.org/physical-activity/yoga-and-sleep
The Sleep Charity (2020) "Information and Support: Children". Available from <https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/information-support/children/?nowprocket=1>

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