



Healthy Lifestyles: Sleep



This factsheet will provide you with some top tips to help you and your child get a better night's sleep as well as links to some very useful websites.

Children aged 4 to 12 years tend to sleep approximately 10 hours per night reducing to 8-9 hours during the teenage years. Most children will experience some sleep difficulties at some point either resisting going to bed, waking in the night, bad dreams or nightmares which may be affected by being scared of the dark or as they get older worries about family, school and friends. Children of all ages will benefit and respond well to a regular bedtime routine as well as feeling safe and secure.

Tip 1: Create a calm, quiet bedtime routine. This should begin shortly after tea with some quiet play, a bath, story and then bed.

Tip 2: Ideally set a time for bed and stick to it. When a good bedtime routine is established occasional later nights as children get older should not be a problem.

Tip 3: Make sure the bedroom is dark, cool and quiet and establish some early rules! No TV, computers or phones in the bedroom and ideally avoid stimulating electronic games 2 hours before bedtime.

Tip 4: Don't expect your child to go to sleep straight away. Once in bed some quiet play, reading or listening to an audio story is fine for a little while until they are ready to drop off.

Tip 5: Get everyone in the family to stick to the routine.

Tip 6: 'I am hungry' 'I am thirsty' – A light supper before tooth brushing and keeping a glass of water next to the bed can help.

Tip 7: When problems do occur try to stay calm and avoid getting anxious. If your child gets up or is difficult to settle by themselves; check they're ok, reassure them, give them a quick cuddle but then tuck them back into their own bed. Remember your child needs to learn to go to sleep independently. Repeat and keep repeating the above whilst remaining calm, firm and consistent!

Tip 8: Sometimes sleep problems are affected by daytime routines; Make sure your child has regular exercise and plenty of fresh air. Avoid fizzy drinks and energy drinks which contain a lot of sugar and caffeine.

Tip 9: Is your child worried or scared? If this is the case, aim to talk and reassure your child in the daytime so that bedtime and sleep can be a calm and restful time.

Tip 10: If you have tried these tips, but your child keeps having problems getting to sleep or sleeping through the night, you may feel you could do with more support. Begin by keeping a sleep diary and then speak to your GP about your worries so that further assessment or support can be given.