

Children & Sleep

Sleep is no less important than food, drink, or safety in the lives of children. Although this may seem apparent, many of us actually do not allow our children to get the critical sleep they need to develop and function properly.

"Sleep is the power source that keeps your mind alert and calm. Every night and at every nap, sleep recharges the brain's battery. Sleeping well increases brainpower just as weight lifting builds stronger muscles, because sleeping well increases your attention span and allows you to be physically relaxed and mentally alert at the same time. Then you are at your personal best."

Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child, Marc Weissbluth, MD

Age	Recommended (Remember every child is different)
Newborns - 0-3 months	14 to 17 hours
Infants - 4-11 months	12 to 15 hours
Toddlers - 1-2 years	11 to 14 hours
Preschoolers - 3-5 years	10 to 13 hours
School-aged Children - 6-13 years	9 to 11 hours

Number 1 Tip for good sleeping habits is maintaining the same routine every night – for example:

1. Have a light snack
 2. Take a bath.
 3. Put on pajamas.
 4. Brush teeth.
 5. Read a story.
 6. Make sure the room is quiet and at a comfortable temperature.
 7. Put your child to bed.
 8. Say goodnight and leave.
- Make bedtime the same time every night.
 - Make bedtime a positive and relaxing experience without TV or videos. Save your child's favorite relaxing, non-stimulating activities until last and have them occur in the child's bedroom.
 - Keep the bedtime environment (e.g. light, temperature) the same all night long.

A study led by the chief of General Pediatrics at MassGeneral Hospital for Children finds that children ages 3 to 7 who don't get enough sleep are more likely to have problems with attention, emotional control and peer relationships in mid-childhood.

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"We found that children who get an insufficient amount of sleep in their preschool and early school-age years have a higher risk of poor neurobehavioral function at around age 7,"

Elsie Taveras, MD, MPH, Pediatrics professor Harvard Medical School, chief of General Pediatrics at MassGeneral Hospital for Children

1. Sleep boosts brain development

According to a Canadian study published in 2008 in the journal, *Sleep*, children who get less than 10 hours of sleep every night before age 3 are more likely to develop language and reading problems among other brain disorders like ADHD as they grow older. Sleep helps in brain development because there is a strong relationship between sleep and neuroplasticity (structural and functional changes that take place in the brain through training and experience). Getting good sleep helps the brain increase brain tissue (known as grey matter) as well as alter brain circuits known as synapses. Although the adult brain is capable of making these changes, it does so at a smaller scale. The most crucial period for these brain changes is during the first three years of life. This is, in fact, one of the main reasons children recover from head trauma faster than adults.

2. Sleep boosts learning

Studies have also proven that kids who take naps remember more. One such study has been done by neuroscientists from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The neuroscientists who studied 40 preschoolers discovered that kids who took daily naps averaging 77 minutes were able to remember everything they learned while those who didn't take daily naps forgot approximately 15% of what they had learned.

3. Sleep boosts growth

Your child also needs healthy sleep because deep sleep boosts growth. Numerous studies show a relationship between poor sleep and deficient levels of GH (the growth hormone). The growth hormone is secreted most effectively during deep sleep. This is according to Judith Owens, Director of Sleep Medicine at the Children's National Medical Center in Washington, D.C. The importance of deep sleep can't, therefore, be overlooked when it comes to growth.

4. Sleep boosts heart health

Sleep has also been linked to heart health. According to numerous research studies, kids who get adequate amounts of good sleep have lower vascular damage risks. Poor sleep has also been linked to high obesity, diabetes and heart disease risks among children. According to Jeffrey Durmer, Ph.D., a sleep specialist in Atlanta, children who suffer from sleep disorders have elevated glucose and cortisol levels at night which increase their risks of suffering from heart-related ailments.