

## Sleep

### What is it, how does it impact us and how to get enough of it

#### What is sleep and why is it important?

Sleep is a natural behaviour. However hard we try to fight it, we all need to sleep for part of each 24 hour period. While we are asleep we are in a reduced state of awareness, but that doesn't mean that our bodies and minds turn off completely during this time. Lots of important processes happen while we are asleep, including the consolidation of memory, growth, repair and renewal of cells and strengthening of the immune system. A Primary School child needs 9-11 hours each night to allow their body to carry out the full amount of growing, repairing and protecting required for their age. Lack of sleep may contribute to obesity, Type 2 Diabetes and conditions of later life such as stroke and heart disease

Along with exercise and healthy eating, sleep is one of the three things we need to do to stay healthy. When we find ourselves unable to get enough sleep, for whatever reason, it affects not only our physical but also our emotional wellbeing and may contribute to low mood, depression anxiety, stress and difficulty regulating emotions. The part of the brain that stores positive memories is directly affected by lack of sleep, so we remember more negative things and this can make us feel unhappy.

Some of the ways people report feeling when they don't get enough sleep include

- Feel worn out, no energy, no motivation
- Struggle to stay awake when it's quiet
- Hard to concentrate
- Clumsy or accident prone
- Short temper, no patience, grumpy
- Impulsive, irrational or bad behaviour
- Stronger, less controllable emotions
- Low mood, more anxiety and stress

Of course when a child in the family struggles to get to sleep, or remain asleep, these feelings can affect not only the child themselves, but everyone else as well, with tiredness affecting family relationships, parents work and siblings school experience among other things.

Below is a hypnogram showing what our sleep pattern might look like.

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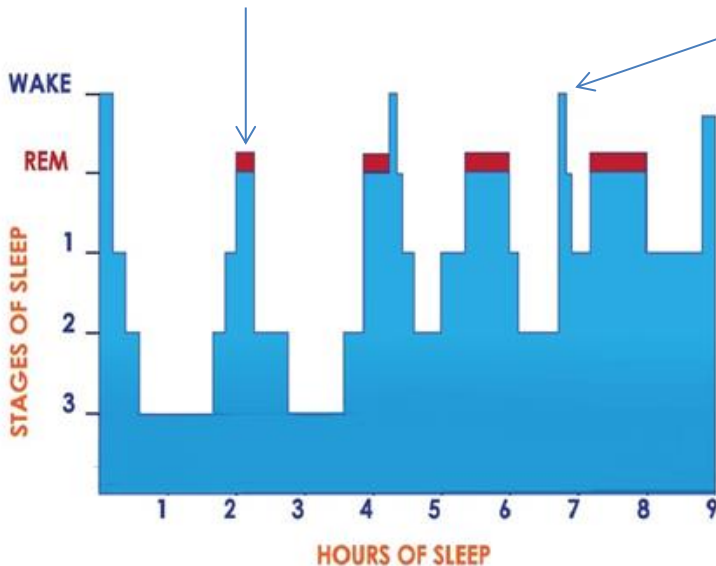
Working together to make sense of the world

### REM – Rapid Eye Movement sleep

This is often when we dream, and is also believed to be when lots of memory consolidation occurs. As we have the biggest blocks of REM towards the end of our sleep it's important to make sure we get enough sleep

### Waking during the night

It is part of a normal sleep cycle to wake briefly during the night. Most people simply turn over and go back to sleep, and may not even be aware that they have woken. This becomes harder if a child does not know how to settle themselves back to sleep.



It's important to go through all the different stages of sleep each night to ensure that your body and brain have the right amount of time to carry out all their functions. If we don't go to sleep early enough, but still have to get up at the same time, we miss out on part of our sleep cycle. This could have an impact on memory consolidation and learning.

### What is the body clock and how does it relate to sleep?



Our body clocks are regulated by external stimuli which helps us to expect to do certain things at certain times of day. Light is the most important stimuli which helps to reset our body clocks each day. Other examples include meals, social interactions, exercise, external temperature and sound. Ensuring that you have regular routines for these things can help your body clock to be ready for sleep when bedtime comes around.

Light triggers the hormone *cortisol* to be produced, which keeps you awake.

Darkness triggers *melatonin* to be produced, which helps make your body ready to sleep.

### What can stop you from getting a good night's sleep?

- Use of screens (phones, tablets, computers, TV) which produce blue light within the last hour before going to bed prompts production of *cortisol* and inhibits the body from producing *melatonin*, meaning we may not feel sleepy when we should.
- Consuming too much caffeine and other stimulants, particularly later in the day.
- Stress and anxiety, which also stimulate the body to produce *cortisol*.
- Bedroom environment contains too many distractions.
- Lack of natural light to help reset the body clock.
- Showers before bed can be stimulating rather than relaxing.

## What can you do to help yourself get a good night's sleep?



### *During the day*

- Get out into natural light for at least 30 minutes as early as possible
- Avoid too many caffeine based drinks
- Find ways of dealing with stress or anxiety
- Avoid having a nap during the day
- Do not have a long lie-in at weekends – get up at the same time every day



### *During the evening*

- Clear homework out of the way early
- Have a good meal, but not too close to going to bed
- Do any stimulating activities such as exercise, watching TV and playing computer games earlier in the evening

### *The last hour before bed*

- Switch off your TV, computer, phone and anything with a screen!
- Have a bath, wind down and chill out
- Read or listen to relaxing music
- Stick as closely as you can to the same bedtime and getting up times, even at weekends
- Try a relaxation technique in bed to help you drift off to sleep



### *The bedroom*

- Try and create a 'sleep room'
- Keep your bedroom dark and cool
- Make sure your bed is comfortable
- Use subdued lighting
- Remove pets that are nocturnal



## Helping your child to self-settle

This is intended to be a quick overview of some steps to help your child learn to self-settle. We have another help sheet which covers this in more detail.

- Step 1:** Choose a reasonable bedtime when the child is tired, but not overtired.
- Step 2:** Start a regular relaxing routine about 1 hour before bedtime.
- Step 3:** Use visuals to reinforce what is going to happen.
- Step 4:** Go to the night-time rooms (bedroom and bathroom) and don't go back downstairs.
- Step 5:** Have a relaxing bath that could last up to 15-20 minutes.
- Step 6:** Take time to rub and cuddle the child with a towel and put on pyjamas.
- Step 7:** Take the child to the bedroom and read a story or put on a story tape.

**Step 8: Once the routine is complete, say goodnight.**

**Your goal is now to distance yourself gradually from the child's room is a series of steps. This could take days or weeks according to the circumstances of each family.**

**Step 9: If necessary, begin by sitting by the side of the bed, with a hand resting (still, no patting or rubbing) on your child for reassurance.**

**Step 10: Reduce your contact until you are able to sit next to the bed without touching your child.**

**Step 11: Gradually move the chair away**

**Step 12: Be boring – no talking and limited eye contact, just redirect your child to their bed when necessary.**

**Step 13: Wake your child at the same time every day, even at weekends.**

### **Summary**

- Consider what goes on during the day – could anything potentially be affecting sleep?
- Get a good routine in place for the evening – make sure you are removing any potential barriers to good sleep
- Plan a 'wind down hour' and leave the day behind
- Try to have the bedroom as a 'sleep room' rather than a bedsit – even if you change things every night for the wind down hour
- Be boring as you redirect your child to bed – you don't want to give them any reward for getting up.
- Try to be kind, firm and consistent throughout the process.