

## FAQS - Better Sleep and Better Health for children

### ▪ ***What is the brain doing during sleep?***

Sleep is necessary to clean the brain of neurotoxins, regulate emotions, and remodel connections to improve memory and cognition. As a result of the positive effect sleep has on the brain at night, children and adults have more positive moods and empathy, better problem solving, less risk-taking, and better academic performance. Understanding what sleep is doing for us helps us to understand what goes wrong when our children don't get enough sleep.

Message for child: during sleep our brain is very actively improving itself.  
Sleep at night makes our brain work better during the day.

### ▪ ***How much sleep is needed to do this?***

Age and our genetics govern individual daily sleep timing and duration. For children, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommend the following ranges:

- 10-13 hours for children 3 to 5 years of age
- 9-12 hours for children 6 to 12 years of age
- 8-10 hours for teenagers 13 to 18 years of age

Message for child: In elementary school, you need at least 10 hours of sleep every night.

### ▪ ***What is different about older children?***

After the age of 12, feeling sleepy is gradually delayed by the brain from 8 or 9 o'clock until 11 o'clock during the teenage years. Although this can be made worse by afternoon caffeine or evening electronic devices, it is largely driven by a universal delay in the body's sleep clock during adolescence.

Message for child: Older children naturally stay up later.

### ▪ ***How many children are not getting enough sleep?***

Insufficient sleep becomes more likely as children get older. By the time children reach adolescence, nearly 80% are getting less than 7 hours sleep and a third are getting less than 6 hours sleep. (Note once again the recommended sleep times above.)

Message for child: It's more likely in middle school and high school that you do not get enough sleep each night.

▪ ***Why are children not getting enough sleep?***

The most consistent cause is rising too early for activities or school, especially in middle and high school. Irregular sleep schedules, electronic devices in the bedroom, and caffeine use into the afternoon and evening are also enemies of sleep at night.

Message for child: Getting up too early and going to bed too late stops you from getting enough sleep.

▪ ***Since each child is different, how do I know if my child is not getting enough sleep?***

If a child needs an alarm clock or someone to awaken them on school days and if they sleep an hour or more later on weekend days, then the weekly sleep schedule is not providing adequate sleep. If a child is falling asleep during the day, then insufficient sleep may be impairing mood and brain performance.

Message for child: You shouldn't feel sleepy during the day or have trouble getting up in the morning.

▪ ***What happens if my child has insufficient sleep?***

- Insufficient sleep is associated with depressed moods, increased emotional outbursts, increased risky behavior, and poorer performance on tests.
- Chronically-insufficient sleep is associated with overall poorer academic performance, depressed moods with suicidal thinking, and obesity in children.
- Car accidents and substance use are associated with chronically-insufficient sleep in teens.

Message for child: When you do not get enough sleep, you may feel sleepy and you might feel sad.

▪ ***How long does it take for my child to catch up if they have insufficient sleep?***

A weekend is not enough. It may take many days to a week or more before all the symptoms of chronically insufficient sleep disappear.

Message for child: You can't catch up on sleep in one weekend.

▪ ***Are there some tips that help?***

- A regular bed time and awakening time helps to ensure that the sleep clock is healthy and that your child will be able to fall asleep and get up at the right times.
- Children are more likely to follow a sleep schedule if they understand the benefit and if the plan is consistent.
- When a student looks sleepy, his or her thinking is probably impaired.
- Do not let a teen drive if they are sleepy. Car accidents are the number one cause of death for teenagers. Driving sleepy can be just as dangerous as driving while under the influence. In addition to advising your teen to buckle up and put their phones away, ensure they are obtaining an adequate amount of sleep to be on the safe on the road.
- If an athlete performs with insufficient sleep, he or she is more likely to lose the game.
- Having a computer in the bedroom is associated with later bedtimes, later wake-up times, and shortened sleep duration.
- The more days per week that students spend practicing or doing sports *before* school, the lower the self-reported grades.
- Drinking a caffeinated beverage after 5 p.m. increases the likelihood of interrupted sleep.
- If your child's wake-up time is later than school start time in the summer, making gradual changes in sleep schedule 2 weeks before school start is better than waiting until the last minute.
- Planning homework tasks over the week results in better academic performance than procrastination and late night studying.

Message for child: There are ways to help you get the sleep you need, and you should talk with your parent about these.

Final Note: There are some conditions that make children sleepy, even if they get enough sleep. If getting sleep doesn't help, you should see your family healthcare provider.