

Give Your Child the Gift of Sleep! – Winter 2008

A recent poll by the National Sleep Federation indicates that on average, American children get 15 - 20% less sleep daily than recommended by sleep experts. While common sense tells us that an overtired child can be difficult to deal with, parents may not be fully aware of the range of consequences from chronic sleep deprivation in children. Did you know that:

- **Sleep deprived children are 86% more likely to suffer from injuries.** Children between the ages of three and five are especially at risk.
- **Sleep deprived teens are more likely to get in car accidents.**
- **Sleep deprivation increases a child's risk for obesity.** Overtired children are more likely to crave sweets and junk food and less likely to exercise. In addition, experts believe that insufficient sleep may cause hormonal changes which increase hunger and interfere with how the body stores calories.
- **Sleep deprivation can lead to poor performance in school, poor decision making and mood swings.**
- **Sleep deprivation can lead to symptoms that are mistaken as ADHD.**

Signs that your child may be suffering from sleep deprivation:

- Difficulty waking in the morning
- Irritability in the afternoon
- Falling asleep during the day
- Oversleeping on the weekend
- Having difficulty remembering or concentrating
- Waking up often / having trouble going back to sleep
- Needing too much “help” from parents to fall asleep

How much sleep do children need?

While individual sleep needs can vary, the average amount of sleep suggested by experts for particular age groups is:

0 to 2 months: 10 1/2 - 18 hours/day

Infants: 14 - 15 hours/day

Toddlers : 12 - 14 hours/day

Preschoolers: 11 - 13 hours/night

School-age children: 10 - 11 hours/night

Teens: 8 1/2 - 9 1/2 hours/night

What age group is the most sleep deprived? - Teens Biological sleep patterns shift in adolescence making it more difficult to fall asleep earlier in the evening. Removing cell phones, TVs and computers from a teen's room, encouraging a balanced schedule, and insisting on “quiet time” after 9 or 10 pm can help teens get to sleep earlier.

Suggestions to help your child get the sleep they need:

- Cut down on caffeine consumption (including chocolate and sodas).
- Provide the opportunity for daily exercise (at least 2 hours before bedtime).
- Help children achieve a balanced schedule which allows for sufficient downtime and sleep.
- Take technology out of the bedroom - TV, computer, cell phone etc.
- Establish a consistent, reasonable bedtime and wake time throughout the week. This schedule should be maintained on the weekends, though teens can be permitted to sleep in 1 - 2 hours on weekend mornings.
- Wind down activities (homework, TV, computer, etc.) at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Have a light snack before bedtime.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine such as reading.
- Interact with your child at bedtime - don't let the TV, computer or video games take your place.
- Make sure your child's bedroom is comfortable - quiet, cool and dark (no more light than nightlight).
- Remind your child to stay quiet and in bed, then say goodnight. Don't stay with your child till he falls asleep. Children need to learn to fall asleep on their own.
- Praise your child for caring enough about their health to get a good night's sleep.
- Talk to your child's provider if you are concerned about your child's sleep or if he or she has trouble breathing at night or snores while sleeping.