



OCCUPATIONAL AND PHYSICAL THERAPY TEAM

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Sleep

Why is sleep so important?

Our bodies need a good night's sleep. Sleep helps restore our bodies and our minds. Not having enough sleep can lead to serious health problems. Sleep problems are one of the most common concerns for parents, affecting about 25% of children. Preschoolers aged 3-5 typically require 11-13 hours of sleep each night. Both quality and quantity of sleep are equally important. We want to help our children develop healthy, independent sleep patterns so that everyone can get the important rest that our bodies need.

Sleep Hygiene

Sleep hygiene refers to the practices and habits that are necessary to have good nighttime sleep quality and full daytime alertness. Children establish sleep habits while they are young and these are the habits that will continue on with them into adulthood. Parents start to build these habits at about 4 months of age, as children learn to fall asleep on their own without someone rocking, feeding or soothing them to sleep. Below are some helpful hints for good sleep hygiene to ensure your child has a good sleep hygiene.

- Adhere to a bedtime routine and schedule regardless of the season. This helps build consistency around the time children are ready for bed.
- Healthy eating and at least 90 minutes of physical activity during the day (but not too close to bedtime) ensure a child is ready for bed. Consistent mealtimes and physical activity help set the wake-sleep cycle.
- Set up the sleep environment to cue your child for sleep. Keep noise levels low, have dim lighting and have the room at a comfortable, slightly cool temperature.
- If sound carries in your house and wakes your child, use a fan or a white noise machine in their room.
- It is important that the conditions under which your child falls asleep are available during the night when they wake up. For example, your child should fall asleep in the same spot where he/she is to sleep through the whole night, keep lighting and temperature consistent.
- Keep nap times to 40-45 minutes long.
- Wash bedding at least once every two weeks. Sheets and duvets collect dust mites, which may cause breathing problems and disrupt sleep.



Remember!

Bedtime activities should be calming and relaxing, to prepare your child for sleep. Avoid TV, phones and iPads at least 2 hours before sleeping, as it can make it difficult to fall and stay asleep.

Keep all devices out of the bedroom.

Establishing a Sleep Routine

One of the best ways to start establishing good sleep habits in children is to follow a nightly routine. A bedtime ritual makes it easier for your child to relax, fall asleep and sleep through the night. Be sure to follow the same routine every night to keep things predictable and consistent. A visual schedule can help keep things consistent for everyone (caregivers, child, babysitter etc).

Typical Bedtime Routine:

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 in bed and say goodnight

Tips for Troubleshooting Sleep

- **The Bedroom is for Sleep:** For the child who struggles to sleep, the bedroom should be used only for sleep. Avoid daytime play and remove toys that are distracting at night.
- **Small Changes with Lots of Warning:** If it's a challenge to get your child to bed, make changes gradual and give lots of warning. For example, if your child watches TV right up to bedtime, warn your child in advance that TV shows are done after bathtime or brushing teeth, 1 hour before bedtime.
- **Family Rules:** Set an evening family routine and rules around bedtime hours. If you say 8:30pm is bedtime, gently but firmly stick with it. Avoid negotiations that change the schedule day-to-day, or your child will continue to try to convince you to adjust it.
- **Role Modeling:** Be a good role model. For example, if you've told your child they can't use their iPad in the evening, avoid using your phone.
- **Trouble Staying in Their Room:** If your child wakes in the night and has trouble staying in their room, get them what they need, such as water or the bathroom. Then gently keep redirecting them back to bed with something of comfort (stuffed animal, blanket or other). Avoid lingering in the room more than a few minutes to help them settle.
- **Sleep Aids:** If necessary, look into a visual clock (Example, right), which shows your child when they are allowed to leave their room. You can also set up the bedroom for sleep using fans or white noise machines, and blocking out light using blackout blinds.



You can use sleep training clocks like the Gro Clock, which changes colours when it's time to wake up.

If your child continues to have sleeping concerns, please speak with your school's Occupational Therapist.