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Sleep for Children is Valuable

With school, work, meals, activities, homework, baths, and more all packed into each day, it seems a good night's sleep is the least priority. So often we take from our sleep time to add extra hours to our days, yet how does this affect us and our children?

Sleep is critical for a child's growth, development, and learning. Kids lacking sleep are more likely to behave aggressively and have difficulty learning in school. Similarly, they tend to cry more, listen less, and have shorter fuses. It can also have a negative impact on memory and making decisions.

Children may be lacking sleep when they fall asleep at unscheduled times during the day like in the car, in school, or while eating. While there are some obvious signs a child isn't sleeping well, it may be difficult to recognize because kids are not aware of this themselves. What child can and will say to their parent, "I need more sleep" or "put me to bed earlier?"

Oftentimes parents make the mistake of thinking that if they keep their child up later, they may be sleepier at bedtime. Actually, children have a more difficult time sleeping if they are overtired. It is good to establish a bedtime routine to help a child relax and get ready for sleep. This routine may be 15 to 30 minutes before bedtime and may include reading or bathing.

One of the most likely interruptions of a child's sleep is worry and anxiety. Many things cause worry for kids, but one of the biggest is how they perceive things in their home. Kids have less worry when things at home are calm, consistent, and comforting; and this can also lead to better sleep.

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Bedtime is a chance to give your child the private one-on-one time he or she needs for small discussions and to help prepare them for sleep. Regular scheduled times for sleep provide children with predictable routines that help them feel secure and make sure they are getting the rest they need.

Setting Good Sleep Habits for Kids

DO…

- Make bedtime a special time for you and your child to bond and connect.
- Find the best bedtime by noticing when the child begins to slow down — before they get overtired.
- Keep the same routines each day and evening including the schedule for sleep.
- Have a regular bedtime routine such as reading, bathing, singing a lullaby.
- Use a fan or noise machine in your child's room if they are easily distracted by noise or need soothing sounds to fall asleep.
- Use dim lights in the evening and bright lights in the morning.

DON'T…

- Use anything but water when your child wants a drink at night.
- Let your child sleep with lots of toys in their bed. They will be less distracted to play and will view

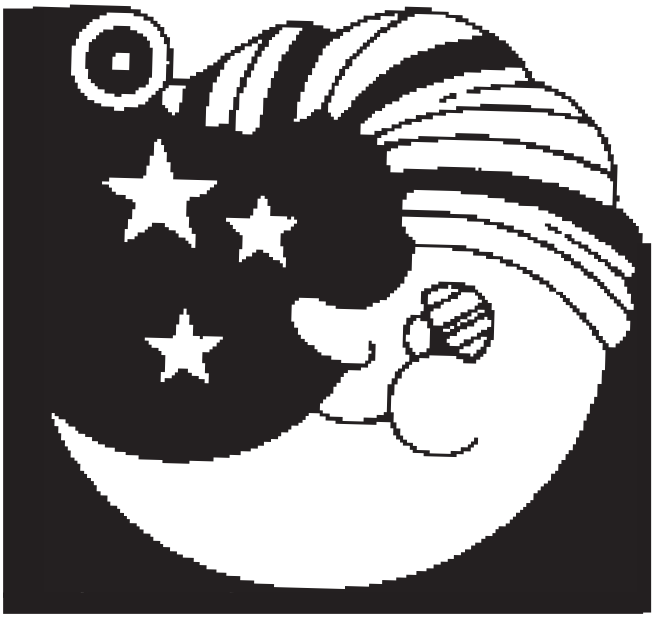
their bed as a place to sleep. It is okay to select one special toy, stuffed animal, blanket, or book so they feel secure.
- Use bed as a threat or punishment. Instead, help make bedtime pleasant and loving.
- Give your child foods and drinks with caffeine in them such as colas, tea, or chocolate as these items can disrupt sleep.
- Put a television in your child's room or let them watch a lot of TV or videos before bedtime. Studies have shown this can disturb sleep.

Sleep Needs for Different Ages

Sleep requirements vary greatly by the child's age. There is a predictable range of hours based on their stage of development, but each child will have their own individual sleep needs.

Birth to 12 Months

- Newborns sleep much more than they are awake, on average 16-18 hours a day. Older infants sleep about 14-15 hours.
- Sleep is spread over multiple periods and is usually related to eating schedule.
- Babies show they are ready for sleep by clues like fussing, turning their heads side to side, sucking thumbs, rubbing their eyes, pushing people and things away with their feet.
- To help reduce the risk of suffocation or SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), place babies on their backs to sleep. Keep their crib clear of toys and soft, fluffy bedding, especially away from their head, mouth, and nose.



One to Three Years

- Toddlers sleep about 12-14 hours a day, including one or two naps.
- A favorite toy or blanket, or a soft light, can help calm their feelings of being alone.
- Allowing the child to make choices around bedtime, such as what pajamas to wear or which book to read, helps them feel like bedtime is not being forced upon them.
- Think ahead of why your child might keep getting out of bed and try to take care of those things beforehand. The child also might want to sleep with you in your bed. Set limits early on how many times your child can ask for something and where they sleep. Be consistent.

Four to Five Years

- About 11-13 hours is adequate for preschoolers.
- Quiet time can replace naptime.
- Nightmares are common – calming the child after a nightmare is essential.
- Nighttime toileting accidents will require some work.

Elementary School-Aged Children

- Between 9 to 11 hours of sleep time is needed.
- Demands on their time and attention due to school and other activities may impact their sleep.
- If the child can go to bed and fall asleep easily in about 15-30 minutes, wake up without trouble, and can be alert during the day, then they're getting enough sleep.

Teens

- At least 8 1/4 to 9 1/2 hours of sleep is needed per night. As they progress through puberty, they actually need more.
- Their natural body rhythms and hormones are different from younger children and adults. This internal time clock often leads to teens wanting to stay up later and to sleep in later.
- Teens keep a hectic schedule that often interferes with sleep, resulting in becoming sleep deprived. Just an hour less per night can feel like a full night without sleep by the end of the week. This leads to using the weekends to catch up on sleep.

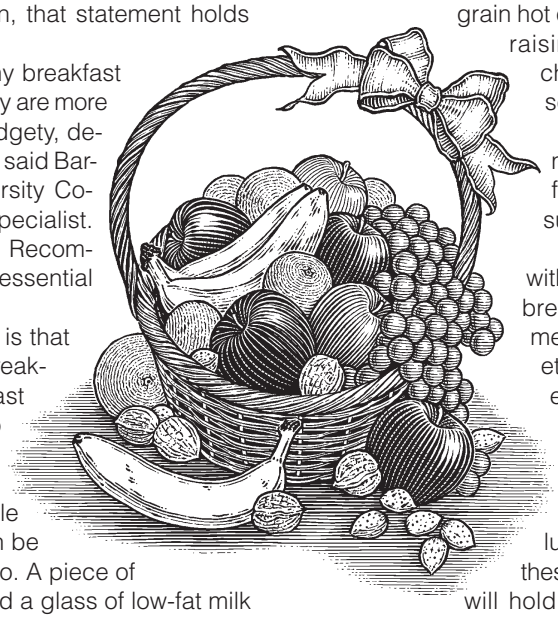
References & Resources

Iowa State University Extension, *Children and Sleep* www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1784.pdf
National Sleep Foundation, Sleep for Kids www.sleepforkids.org
New York Online Access to Health, Children and Sleep www.noah-health.org/en/sleep/concerns/children.html
University of Michigan Health System www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/sleep.htm
University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, *Getting their ZZZs: Understanding and Meeting Your Child's Sleep Needs* http://ceinfo.unh.edu/News/GetZZZZs.htm

Breakfast: The Most Important Meal

We often hear "breakfast is the most important meal of the day." When it comes to children, that statement holds even more truth.

Children who do not eat a healthy breakfast often have trouble concentrating. They are more likely to be described as anxious, fidgety, depressed or irritable by their teachers, said Barbara Brown, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service food specialist. They get less than two-thirds of the Recommended Daily Allowance for many essential vitamins and minerals.



One good thing to keep in mind is that breakfast does not have to mean "breakfast foods." Just because a breakfast is nutritious does not mean it has to be boring or take a lot of time to prepare.

A slice of cold cheese or vegetable pizza and a 100% fruit juice box can be a healthy choice and eaten on the go. A piece of toast with peanut butter, a peach and a glass of low-fat milk provides many nutrients children need for a day of learning.

Other quick and tasty breakfast ideas include adding dried cranberries and almonds to instant oatmeal; combine low-fat milk, fresh or frozen strawberries and a banana in the blender for a fruit smoothie; spread peanut butter on a whole grain hot dug bun, add a banana and sprinkle with raisins; or sprinkle grated Monterey Jack cheese on a corn tortilla, microwave for 20 seconds and top with salsa.

"With breakfast cereal, choose those made with whole-grains. They keep us feeling full longer than foods with high sugar," Brown said.

Try to include at least one serving of fruit with breakfast. Individuals who skip fruit with breakfast are less likely to eat the recommended 5 to 7 servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Orange juice, unsweetened apple sauce, raisins, bananas, or pancakes or cereal topped with berries are a few examples of including a serving of fruit into breakfast.

Some children may have a late school lunch period. It is especially important for these children to eat a nutritious breakfast that will hold them over until their scheduled lunch break.

"Breakfast should have as much priority in your child's life as homework," Brown said. "Children need good nutrition not only for growth, but for performing well in school too."

Helpful Homework Habits

While some children just breeze right through homework assignments, it can be a battle for others. Developing a plan of action for homework is one way to help ensure a student's success.

If parents and children expect homework on a daily basis, it can be worked into the routine. Some children may work best in the afternoon right after school. Other children may need to unwind before tackling homework assignments.

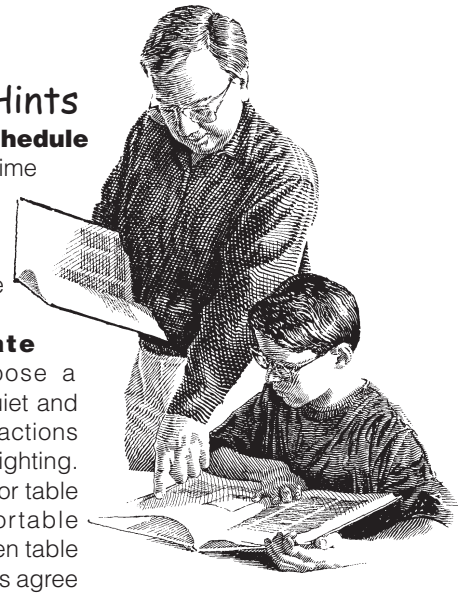
As much as parents want their children to succeed, they have to keep in mind that doing the homework is not a parent's job. No matter how much your child struggles, he or she won't learn if you do the work for them.

By about fifth grade, students should be showing signs of independence when it comes to homework. That does not mean parents should not be involved, but they should not try to manage all the details either. Learning to work independently is part of the whole learning experience. However, when students do not complete assignments, they need to learn to deal with the consequences.

Parents should talk with the teacher if their child is struggling with a particular assignment. Sometimes just a short note to the teacher is helpful. Other times it could be useful to meet in person. If a child is struggling, try to get to the bottom of the difficulty as quickly as possible.

It's also very important to encourage your child to always do their best. Let them know their education is important to you and you'll do everything you can to help them be as successful as they can possibly be.

Homework Hints



A homework schedule - Set a regular time each day and stick to it. Plan the time that best suits the child.

An appropriate place - Choose a place that is quiet and free from distractions and has good lighting. Provide a desk or table and a comfortable chair. The kitchen table will work if others agree to stay out of the room.

Basic study supplies – Store needed items such as pencils, glue sticks, markers, scissors, and paper near the study area in a basket or decorated shoe box.

Keep track of assignments and projects - Find out from the teacher how and when homework assignments will be sent home. Be sure to check every day and read any messages or papers sent home by the teacher.

Help only when needed - Help your child with homework when needed, but do not do it for him/her. The child only

learns when he/she does the work. Check over all homework and have your child correct any mistakes. Turn mistakes into positive learning opportunities!

Encourage to always do their best - Praise all papers and projects brought home! Display them in a special place for all to see.

Adapted from: Jelley, K. (1997) *Backpack Buddies: Good Study Habits and Homework* (Fact Sheet FF-B-3). The Ohio State University Extension.

Web Resources on Development - Birth to Age 5

The following websites contain current research-based information for parents, caregivers, educators, and service providers. Most have materials that can be downloaded or ordered for mail delivery. Spanish is available on all sites.

Learn the Signs. Act Early
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/actearly

Helps learn about milestones in children's growth and recognizing developmental delays and other disabilities. Includes a toolkit of tips, growth chart, and fact sheets. By the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

Zero to Three
www.zerotothree.org

Includes resources on development in the first three years such as play, music, movement, preparing for school, early learning, and various special topics. This site also includes:

- **Brain Wonders** - Information about early brain development and the relationships between babies and their parents or caregivers that supports intellectual, social, and emotional development.
- **Healthy Minds -** Summarizes how to nurture a child's healthy development and growing brain. Coincides with well-baby check-ups.
- **The Magic of Everyday Moments®** - To help understand and gain ideas for using simple, everyday moments to promote children's social, emotional, and intellectual development.

Born Learning
www.bornlearning.org

Tools and tips to help actively engage children in early learning as part of their everyday lives. Created by United Way of America, the Ad Council, and Civitas.

Early Learning: Focus on Birth to Five
www.pbs.org/parents/earlylearning

Information about how young children learn, how kids learn to communicate, and how to handle stress. Sponsored by Public Broadcasting System (PBS) station KCTS/Seattle and Seattle-based Talaris Research Institute.

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