

Sleep

Sleeping is an essential part of our lives, it's as important as eating, drinking, and breathing to the body. Sleep helps the brain and body recover from everything we do during the day. Getting enough sleep is necessary for maintaining a child's physical, mental and emotional well-being. Lack of sleep can affect many bodily functions, including:

- **Mood** – children can become more irritable and grumpier when they don't get enough sleep. This can lead to increased behavioural difficulties, they may struggle to concentrate and become more disruptive.
- **Mental Health** – if a child does not get enough sleep over long periods this can lead to mental health problems like anxiety and depression.
- **Immune System** – getting enough sleep can help fight off physical illnesses.
- **Weight** – when a child is tired it can affect their ability to regulate their hunger and appetite. It can cause your child to overeat and affect how the body processes food.

This document will give guidance about establishing sleep routines, and some tips and tricks to try.

Ensuring your child is sleeping restfully can be stressful. It is important to remember that every child is different, and what works for one individual, may not work for another. It is also important to think about the time needed to change sleep routines, and that change will take time to achieve. If you are concerned or worried, please contact your Occupational Therapist for support.

How much sleep does my child need?

Every child is different, and the amount of sleep each individual needs will depend on them. As a general guide, the NHS recommend that the amount of sleep children get changes as they grow, this is shown in the table below:

Child's Age	Amount of Sleep Recommended (In 24 Hr Period)
0-4 Months	8-18 Hours (Including naps)
4-12 Months	12-16 Hours (Including Naps)
1-2 Years	11-14 Hours (Including Naps)
3-5 Years	10-13 Hours (Including Naps)
6-12 Years	9-12 Hours
13-18 Years	8-10 Hours

NHS England (2024)

Creating a Routine

Creating an environment and routine that sets a child up for sleep is important, just like adults, too much stimulation when tired can cause a child to not sleep well. Healthy sleep routines (also known as sleep hygiene or a bedtime routine) are very important for children's physical, mental and emotional well-being at every developmental stage. If your child has had enough sleep, they will be ready to have fun and learn.

There are 3 core principles to consider when creating a sleep routine:

1. Avoid bright lights from electronics like TVs or phones
2. Create a calm and comfortable environment for your child
3. Stay consistent and predictable with the routine.

Preparing the Routine

Every child is different with different needs and preferences, when setting up a routine you need to keep your own child in mind. What works for some children, may not work for others. It can take time to see the benefits of a sleep routine so don't worry if it takes some trial and error before you find the best routine for your child.

If your child does not have a set routine, you may need to start slowly and build up to a full bedtime routine. Some ways to get started with a routine is by:

- Noticing what time your child naturally gets tired.
- Starting your new 'wind down' routine about an hour before your child naturally gets tired.
- Gradually shift bedtime to one that suits your family lifestyle and makes sure your child gets enough sleep – even if this is in tiny increments, such as 5-minute changes per night, over a longer period, this can be enough to reset the body's natural clock.

Starting the routine when your child is showing signs of being tired is important, it allows for their body to get used to the routine and the feeling of tiredness indicates the start of going to bed. A routine may involve a few key activities, which if done in order, signify to a child that it's time to go to sleep. Involving the child, or having the routine visually in front of the child might help to keep to these routines. These might include:

- switching off all electronics (TV, games console, tablet, phone or computer) approximately 30-60 minutes before bedtime
- doing a calm activity before bed such as reading, having a bath, or colouring
- brushing your child's teeth or your child brushing their teeth
- changing into pyjamas ensuring your child has gone to the toilet before settling down in bed.

Waking up in the Night

It's very common for children of all ages to wake up during the night. This is a normal part of your child's development, but it can be frustrating for parents. If your child wakes up during the night and gets out of bed you should:

1. Try not to engage in conversations or arguments. Conversations or arguments can wake up your child and delay them from going back to sleep.
2. Calmly lead them back to their bedroom. Remind them that it is bedtime and put them back into bed. You may find it useful to make a communication card saying

“STOP, return to your bedroom” (Available at the end of this document). You will need to repeat this every time they get out of bed.

3. For older children, suggesting they do a relaxing activity that does not involve electronics such as deep breathing, meditation, a puzzle or reading a book may keep a child in bed if they wake up earlier than the ideal time, but who is unlikely to get back to sleep

However, your child may just need a reassuring cuddle before they can go back to bed.

Creating a Space for Sleep

It is common for some children to experience worry about going to bed or sleeping alone.

There are some things you can do to help them settle:

- At bedtime, the bedroom needs to be a calm and relaxing place to help your child settle down ready to sleep. An overstimulating room can make it harder for your child to unwind.
- Check that the [temperature](#) is not too hot or too cold in the bedroom. It is recommended the best temperature is between 16C to 20C.
- Make sure your child has a clean, dry bed with suitable bedding – which includes pillows, a duvet, covers or a sleeping bag. Allowing your child to choose their own bedding may encourage them to sleep in their own room. *If your child is under 1 years old, do not put pillows, duvets or toys in your baby's cot. Read more about keeping your [sleeping baby safe](#).*
- [Check that the bed covers are the right thickness and weight](#). Some children can feel more secure when they are tucked quite tightly under their covers. Heavier blankets may help some children to settle but this will be different for each child.
- Keep your child's room as dark as possible. [Blackout blinds/curtains](#) may help with this and keep the room cooler during the summer.
- If your child is scared of the dark leaving the door ajar or using a [nightlight](#) may help.
- If your child has a favourite cuddly toy or blanket, ensure this is nearby so they can cuddle it if they want to.

- [Night clocks](#) can help younger children know when it is nighttime and what is expected of them.
- Our other guide around Home Equipment also has recommendations for sleep solutions and beds.

Other Tips

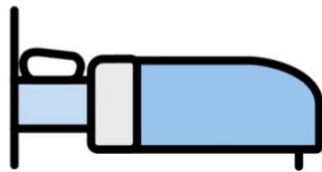
To reduce the likelihood of outbursts or tantrums around bedtime, there are some things you can do outside of the bedtime routine that can help your child to develop healthy sleep habits and improve their overall quality of sleep.

- Avoid caffeine after lunch - Caffeine is a stimulant that prevents sleep. It can cause your child to stay awake for longer and struggle to fall asleep. Caffeine is in energy drinks and fizzy drinks. If your child drinks these, try to limit their intake or avoid them all together after lunchtime.
- Avoid eating a large meal before bedtime – This can prevent sleep. You should consider the best time to have a meal, if you are having a large meal, try to ensure that it is eaten over an hour before your child's sleep routine starts.
- Encourage your child to only use their bed for sleeping - It can be tempting for your child to take naps or rest in their bed outside of bedtime. This can affect how easily they fall asleep and their quality of sleep. Encourage them to use a beanbag or comfy chair to rest in instead of their bed.
- Exercise throughout the day, but not just before bedtime - Children can have difficulty falling asleep if they have been inactive throughout the day. Try encouraging your child to take part in sports and play outside. This can help to burn off energy. If your child isn't very 'sporty', a walk in the fresh air or a little dance party can be helpful. However, exercise should be avoided directly before bedtime as this can make it harder for your child to calm down and prevent them from falling asleep.
- Introduce calming activities during the day to help with stress - Stress can affect sleep. Adding calming activities such as journaling during the day to allow them to unwind, even for 10 minutes can be helpful.

- Try moving the bed to a corner, sleeping under or on top of a bean bag, using a weighted blanket (10% of the child's body weight and add 1lb), lycra sheets, and wearing a compression shirt to bed. Canopy beds or the bottom bunk of a bunk bed can be helpful as well. Many children prefer a defined and cosy space to sleep. Some sensory-seeking children like to sleep on a rough towel (not washed with softener and dried naturally) and used as a bed sheet gives sensory stimuli throughout the night.
- Be sure the room is free of distractions, light, or clutter. White noise or soft instrumental music is also a great tool.
- If possible, have the child sleep in their own space, even creating a nice cosy cave in a big walk-in closet or possibly in a play tent filled with pillows and blankets is a great place for sleep.
- Some children may like a [Yoga hammock](#) in their bedroom for stories and singing immediately before bedtime. Some children can even sleep in these; however, parents need to consider risks such as being low to the floor etc. This is only appropriate for children old enough and able to manoeuvre around in the swing throughout the night and get in and out independently. The swing should hang close to the floor for safe and independent use. Gentle, rhythmical, and linear swinging in a cuddle or hammock swing or Yogapeutics compression swing for at least 15 minutes before bedtime is a great idea. Try a rocking chair in a quiet, calm, dark place right before bedtime.
- Play hard for about 45 minutes before you start the quiet bedtime routine, include rough and tumble play but avoid spinning and sudden start/stop movements. Hang from a trapeze bar or [chin-up bar](#) (you can get them to go in door frames) as this provides active proprioception which is calming and organising.
- Try applying magnesium oil to the bottom of the child's feet at bedtime. Also, [Lush Sleepy body lotion](#) may be worth trying.
- A [vibrating pillow](#) or hand-held massager placed under the mattress for a diffused vibration can be helpful. There are also vibrating mattresses available for purchase.

- Try the "tortilla roll up" in a blanket with added firm pressure (proprioception) from a large [therapy ball](#) by rolling the ball over your child's body while they are lying on their tummy.
- It's important to make slow changes to the bedtime routine and to try each strategy for 1-2 weeks before giving up. Change is hard so it may be met with initial resistance. Try to get your child involved as much as possible in making decisions, such as picking the colour of the towel bedsheet or deciding where the nightlight should be placed. No matter what, keep your sleep at the forefront of your conversations until you find a manageable solution!

Sleep Cards



Stop, go
back to
bed



Night Light



Cuddly toy



Too Hot



Turn off



Turn off



Turn off



Too Cold



Drink



Calm



Read a Book



Puzzle



Colouring



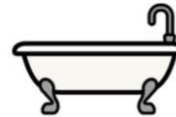
Sleepy



Tired



Good Night



Bath



Brush Teeth



Toilet



I Love You



Sleep Time



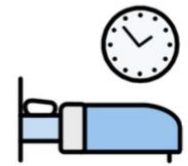
Cuddle



Pyjamas



Lights off



Bedtime