



Top Tips for Healthy Sleep

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Healthy sleep starts with “sleep hygiene” or healthy sleep habits. Follow the rules below to help you and your child fall asleep faster, stay asleep, and wake more refreshed in the morning. Remember, similar to working on other health habits, consistency is the key to achieving results.

Rule #1 – Establish a Bedtime and Wake Up Routine

- Establish a pattern to your sleep by going to bed at the same time each evening and getting out of bed at the same time every day, even on weekends/ holidays and regardless of how much you slept.
 - Your bed and wake time should not vary more than 1 hour from night to night.
- Fall asleep in the same place every night, preferably in your bed!

Rule #2 – Establish a *Pre-Bedtime* Routine

- A pre-sleep routine offers important cues for your body to slow down and get ready for sleep.
- Do the same things every night, and in the same order! For example, eat a snack, take a bath, put on PJ's, brush teeth, listen to music, turn out the lights, and get into bed.

Rule #3 – Regulate your Sleep-Wake Cycle with Light Exposure

- Your circadian rhythm (i.e., biological clock) is regulated by light exposure!
- It is best to avoid screen time (cell phone, TV, computer) 1 to 2 hours before bedtime because this can make it harder for you to fall asleep by blocking the release of your sleepy hormone (i.e. melatonin).
 - If this is a difficult change, try to work on changing this habit gradually. For example, you may first limit electronics 10 minutes before bed and work your way up to an hour. Always reduce brightness on your devices and use any nighttime modes available.
- Instead of screen-time, try to read a book, play board games, or draw.
- Create electronics free bedrooms for both children and caregivers!
 - Take the TV and electronic games out of the bedroom.
 - Create a charging station in the caregiver's bedroom where all cell phones go at night.
- Get plenty of bright light exposure in the morning.
 - Open the curtains, turn on all the lights, eat your breakfast outside.

Rule #4 – Create a Sleep-Friendly Environment

- Create a cool, dark, room that is free from distractions; consider blackout shades or white noise.
- Try to use your bedroom only for sleeping- not playing, computer time, or doing homework.
 - If possible, designate other areas of the house for schoolwork.
 - If this is not possible, try not to work in your bed! Designate a desk or chair as your working space.

Rule #5 – Fuel Your Sleep with Healthy Energy for Your Body

- Strive for 5! Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Stay hydrated – drink plenty of water and remember to get more when you are exercising or active!
- Avoid caffeine in the afternoon because it lasts in the body for several hours (soda, coffee, chocolate).

Rule #6 – Exercise for Better Sleep

- Get plenty of aerobic exercise – aim for 30-90 minutes a day! Make it fun by combining your interests (e.g., active video game, watch favorite show while on treadmill, or go for a hike with a friend)
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Is your child stressed or worried at bedtime? Consider incorporating a relaxation technique into the bedtime routine. Practice makes perfect. Encourage your child to practice when they are calm for the skill to be more effective at bedtime.

Please review the several free relaxation resources below. It is recommended that if you are using an electronic device to play any of these scripts you should flip the device over or turn off the screen to prevent the light from the device from waking up your brain. You can also consider connecting your device to a Bluetooth speaker to avoid the screen altogether.

Guided Relaxation Resources (including evidence-based techniques such as Progressive Muscle Relaxation, Guided Imagery, and Mindfulness exercises)

- YouTube can be a resource for a number of guided relaxation scripts that can be helpful for both children and teens. For example:
 - Ocean Escape (with music): Walk Along the Beach Guided Meditation and Visualization https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ar_W4jSzOIM
 - Guided Meditation and Visualization for Stress Relief: A Forest Walk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgSbF_xH9LU
 - Guided Meditation for Children | Land of the Unicorns <https://youtu.be/g69cyia-aKI>
 - Sleep Meditation for Children | Floating on a Cloud <https://youtu.be/G23p85BA8uI>
 - Guided Meditation for Children | The Fairy Garden <https://youtu.be/R05SOqmW5PI>
- There are several free progressive muscle relaxation scripts available through the practice wise website that are relevant for both children and teens.
 - To find them, go to https://www.practicewise.com/portals/0/MATCH_public/relax.html
 - Select a script that you like in your language (most families prefer Script 1 or 4)
- The Children’s Hospital of Orange County website has guided imagery scripts for kids and is found here: <https://www.choc.org/programs-services/integrative-health/guided-imagery/>
- For teens, Dartmouth’s student wellness center has a number of relaxation exercises available here: <https://students.dartmouth.edu/wellness-center/wellness-mindfulness/relaxation-downloads>

Children’s Books for Relaxation

- *The Sleepy Pebble and Other Stories: Calming Tales to Read at Bedtime* - by Alice Gregory, Christy Kirkpatrick, & Eleanor Hardiman (3-11 years)
- *Take the time: Mindfulness for Kids* - by Maud Roegiers (6-8 years)
- *Master of Mindfulness: How to be your Own Superhero in Times of Stress* - by Laurie Grossman (5-12 years)
- *Relax Kids: The Magic Box: 52 Fantasy Meditations for Children* - by Marneta Viegas (5-12 years)
- *Bedtime Meditations for Kids: Quick, Calming Exercises to Help Kids Get to Sleep* - by Cory Cochiolo (4-8 years)
- *Breathe Like a Bear: 30 Mindful Moments for Kids to Feel Calm and Focused Anytime, Anywhere* - by Kira Willey (4-8 years)

If you continue to have significant difficulty with your child’s sleep talk with your child’s pediatrician about whether or not a referral to the pediatric sleep clinic or a behavioral health provider may be necessary.

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