

Sleep in School-Aged Children (6–12 Years)

WHAT TO EXPECT

School-aged children typically get between 9 and 10 hours of sleep. However, not getting enough sleep is becoming more common. This is often because of homework, after-school activities, evening use of electronics (television, computers, cell phones), and late bedtimes. Sleep problems are also common. These include difficulty falling asleep, waking up at night, sleepwalking, and sleep terrors. Other sleep problems include teeth grinding, nighttime fears, nightmares, bed-wetting, snoring, and noisy breathing. However, as children get older, parents often become less aware that their child is having sleep problems. Be sure and know the signs that your child may not be getting enough sleep:

- **Moody:** Not getting enough sleep may cause your school-aged child to be moody, irritable, and cranky. He may become frustrated or upset more easily.
- **Behavior problems:** Children who do not get enough sleep are more likely to have behavior problems. They may be noncompliant or aggressive. They may have poor impulse control or become overactive. Even just 30 to 60 minutes less sleep at night can affect your child's behavior.
- **Poor thinking skills:** Not getting enough sleep may result in problems with attention, memory, decision-making, organization, and creativity. All of these are important for success in school.
- **Dozing off:** Children should be wide awake during the day. This means that if they *are* falling asleep in class, in the car, or in front of the TV on a regular basis, *something is wrong!* Assume that if this is happening to your child, that he is not getting enough sleep. If he is getting enough sleep at night but is still sleepy during the day, then he may be getting poor quality sleep.
- **Weight problems:** There is a link between not getting enough sleep and being overweight. Children who sleep less tend to be hungrier and eat more. They may exercise less because they are tired. Being overweight is also a risk factor for sleep apnea.

HOW TO HELP YOUR SCHOOL-AGED CHILD SLEEP WELL

- **Develop a regular sleep schedule:** Your child should go to bed and wake up at about the same time each day. Set and stick to a bedtime that ensures that your child gets enough sleep, preferably before 9:00 p.m.
- **Maintain a consistent bedtime routine:** Children continue to benefit from a bedtime routine that is the same every night. It should include calm and enjoyable activities, such as reading. Include one-on-one time with a parent. It is helpful in maintaining communication with your child and having a clear connection every day.
- **Set up a soothing sleep environment:** Make sure your child's bedroom is comfortable, dark, cool, and quiet. A nightlight is fine. A television, computer, or gaming system is not.
- **Make sleep a priority:** As school-aged kids become more and more involved in academic, social, athletic, and other activities, sleep often becomes less of a priority for families. Parents' work and activity schedules spilling over into the evening hours may also conflict with time for sleep. Dinner and homework time may get pushed later and later. Older school-aged children may need help learning to manage their time in the evening, so they can get to bed at a reasonable time.

- **Set limits:** If your child stalls at bedtime, be sure to set clear limits ahead of time. Be clear about what time lights must be turned off and how many stories you will read together.
- **Turn off televisions, computers, tablets, and smartphones:** Television viewing, computer game playing, Internet use, and other stimulating activities just before or at bedtime will often result in sleep problems. Children also can become “dependent” on the TV in order to fall asleep.
- **Avoid caffeine:** Caffeine can be found in sodas, coffee, iced tea, energy drinks, and many other things.
- **Contact your child’s doctor:** Talk to your child’s doctor if your child has difficulties falling asleep or staying asleep, snores, experiences unusual awakenings, or has sleep issues that are causing problems during the day.