

The Value of our Children's Sleep

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Children getting a healthy nights rest is becoming a dilemma. The impact of inadequate sleep for our kids is far reaching. We have come to recognize that adequate sleep is as valuable as exercise and diet.

There are three distinct issues of concern for poor sleep:

- Poor sleep hygiene
- Sleep restriction
- Sleep disorders

Sleep hygiene is basically bad sleeping habits that reduce time to sleep onset and are easily correctable:

- Caffeine use: Average effect is 3-5 hours, but could be as long as 12 hours
- Naps after school
- Exercising before bedtime
- Erratic times for bedtime
- Nicotine use
- Uncomfortable bedding
- Warm sleep environment
- Use of electronic devices or television within 45 minutes of bedtime

Electronic use before bedtime is prevalent – cell phones, reading devices, tablets and television. Unfortunately, these devices emit short-wavelength-enriched light that has a higher concentration of blue light than natural light. Blue light suppresses melatonin, a hormone

that helps induce sleep. Although the optimal choice is to avoid devices, other options include:

- Wearing glasses that block blue light 45 minutes before bedtime
- Purchase filters to place on device screens
- Dim brightness of device

Sleep restriction refers to the reduction of scheduled sleep time to an inadequate amount. The most common circumstances are:

- Too many scheduled activities
- Normal adolescent shift to later bedtimes with very early school days
- Delaying sleep time for media and sleeping with cell phones that interrupt sleep

Sleep disorders that affect pediatric sleep include:

- Sleep disordered breathing caused by abnormalities in the mouth, nose, and throat
- Restless leg syndrome
- Narcolepsy
- Parasomnias including sleepwalking, REM sleep behavior disorder, and sleep terrors
- Teeth grinding (bruxism)
- Bedwetting
- Sleep difficulties related to psychological issues such as anxiety, mood disorders, ADHD and Autism

Sleep difficulties in children are common and have a far reaching effect on behavior and learning that impacts daytime functioning. The following can be seen:

- Poor concentration
- Poor impulse control
- Declining academic performance
- Low energy
- Lack of drive
- Headaches
- Poor decision making
- Depression
- Disruptive behavior
- Impaired memory
- Irritability

It is not surprising that sleep disruption can significantly worsen a variety of conditions including anxiety, depression, ADHD, Autism, and behavior and learning disorders. Sleep disruption can present with symptoms that mimic ADHD. If you suspect your child is suffering from sleep difficulties, consult with your pediatrician, ENT or dentist as a first step in identifying the problem and finding a solution.

<https://sleepfoundation.org>