

Good sleep habits

ALL children (and adults!) benefit from good sleep habits, also known as 'sleep hygiene.'

Make sure you have these good habits in place before making any other changes.

Good habits for sleep

1. A calming bedtime routine: Try to do the same things each night, choosing calm and enjoyable activities to help your child wind down. e.g. dinner, bath, quiet play or read, then into bed.

- Regular sleep and wake times (within 30 minutes)
- Avoid daytime naps (for children 5 and over).

2. A calm, quiet sleep environment: Your child's sleep environment should be cool, quiet, and relatively dark. It should be the same at bedtime as it is throughout the night. For example, the same lighting, and no music unless it will play all night.

3. A media free bedroom: Avoid watching electronic screens such as computer games, iPad and TV for at least one hour before bed.

4. Get morning light: Getting natural light during the morning, by opening the curtains or going outside, helps keep the body clock on the right track.

5. Avoid caffeine from late afternoon: Remember, caffeine is in chocolate bars as well as cola, tea and coffee.

6. Encourage exercise (but not just before bed): Avoid exciting, high-energy activities, just before bed - such as playing outside or running around.

TIP: BE CONSISTENT

Being consistent will increase your chances of success with improving your child's sleep patterns. It is important to stick to good sleep habits, even on weekends and holidays, otherwise your child's sleep patterns can get confused.

Normal sleep

SLEEP is important for:

- The development of children's learning and behaviour
- Restoring physical and mental health
- Memory
- Maintaining our immune system so we don't get sick
- Brain development.

Children who do not get enough sleep may be at risk of under-performing, when compared to their peers.

Science of sleep

Sleep-wake cycles (also called 'circadian rhythms') are regulated by light and dark, and take time to develop. They are stages of sleep that develop from about six weeks of age. By three to six months, most babies have a regular sleep-wake cycle where they sleep more at night and less during the day.

There are two types of sleep that we cycle through many times each night – known as *Deep sleep* and *Light sleep*.

These cycles last 45 – 60 minutes in children and 90 minutes in adults.

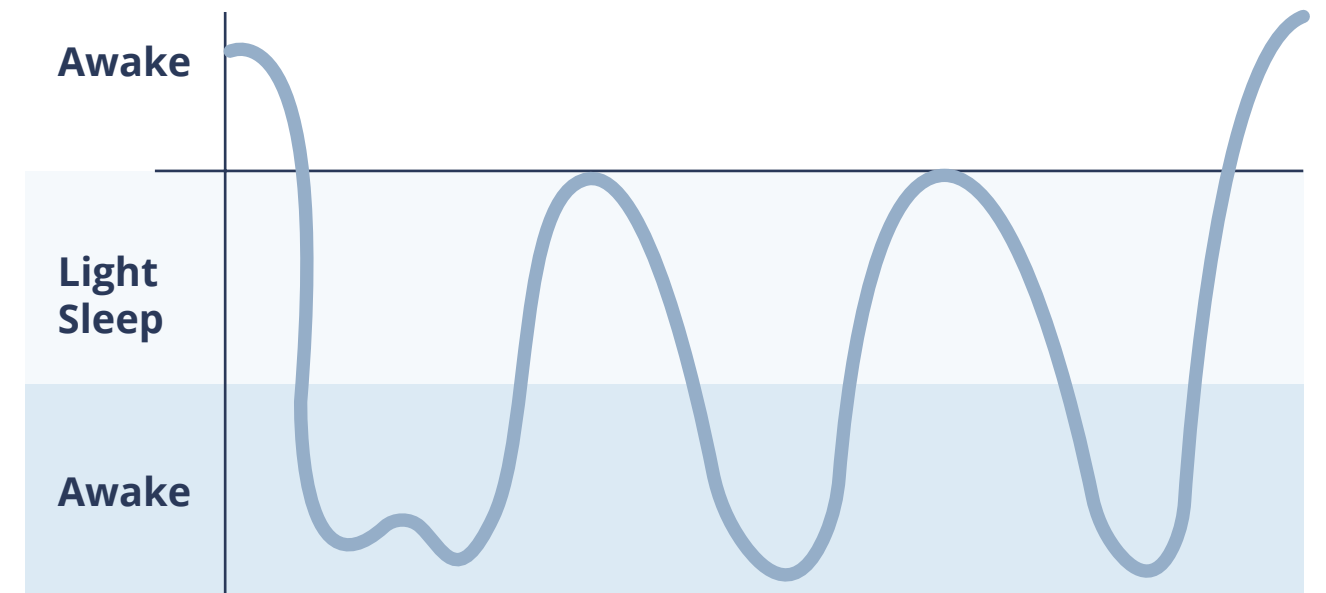
DID YOU KNOW

Waking up overnight is normal:

- **All children wake up during cycles of light sleep**
- **This is only a problem if your child cannot get back to sleep without your help**

DID YOU KNOW

Our brains make *Melatonin*, a sleep hormone, when it is dark. Having a bright light on or having light coming from an electronic screen can stop your child's brain making melatonin.



Light sleep is:

- A time when dreaming occurs, and
- Bodies become still

Deep sleep is:

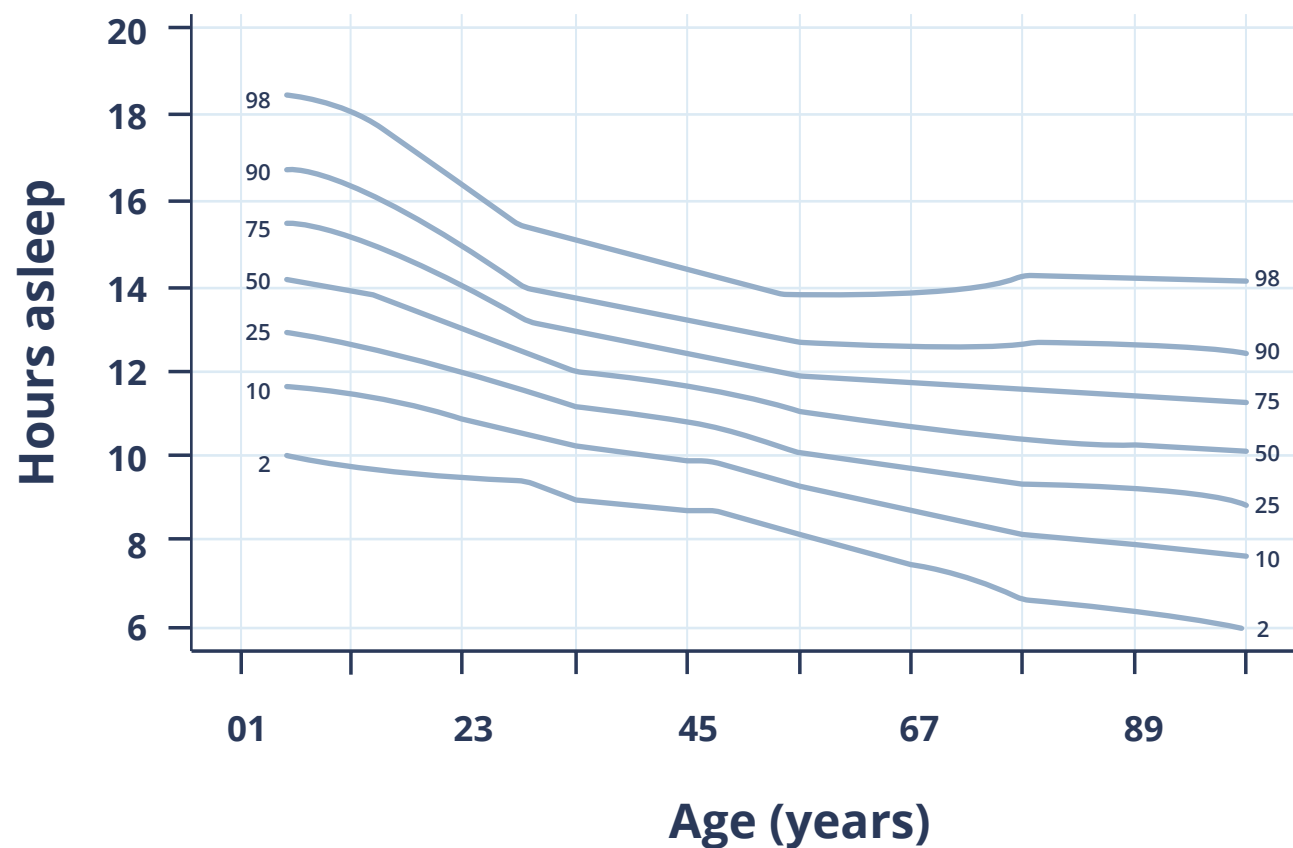
- Important for restoring the body
- A time when essential hormones for growth and development are released

Normal sleep duration

The diagram below shows that normal Australian children vary greatly in how much they sleep each night.

- Most 3 year old children sleep around 12 hours each night, however some may happily sleep as little as 9 hours while others may need as much as 15 hours each night.
- Most children starting school sleep around 11 hours each night, but anywhere between 8 and 14 hours may be right for your child.

Studies have shown that it is likely to be the **timing** of going to bed and rising, as well as the quality of sleep overnight, which has more impact on how the child functions during the day, rather than the actual number of hours slept.



Is my child getting enough sleep?

If your child appears happy and healthy they are probably getting enough sleep for them, even if they sleep less than the average child their age.

Effects of lack of sleep

Emotional: Not enough sleep may cause your child to be moody and irritable. They may be frustrated or upset more easily.

Behaviour: Children who do not get enough sleep are more likely to have behaviour problems, such as not being able to concentrate, being restless or not doing what is asked of them.

Thinking and Learning: Not enough sleep may result in problems with paying attention, memory, decision making, reaction time, and creativity, which are all important in school.

Bedtime Fading

If your child is taking more than an hour to fall asleep after your chosen bedtime, you may find that trying to put your child to bed at the earlier time results in bedtime struggles. For some children it is best to gradually make their bedtime earlier, starting at the time they are naturally tired and ready for bed.

Setting a suitable bedtime

Decide on a suitable bedtime for your child: This will be different for each family and child, considering how much sleep they need, when they need to be up in the morning, and other family needs such as settling all children at a similar time. Ideally, your child should fall asleep around this time every night, to help set your child’s internal body clock. [handout](#) for more information.

Bedtime fading

- A good strategy for changing your child’s bedtime is **Bedtime Fading**:
1. Work out when your child is naturally falling asleep and set this as the **temporary bedtime**. For example, if you want your child to go to bed at 8:30pm, but they usually do not fall asleep until 10:00pm, choose 10:00pm as the temporary bedtime.
 2. Once they are falling asleep easily and quickly at this temporary bedtime then make their bedtime earlier by 15 minutes.
 3. When they are falling asleep easily and quickly at this new bedtime then bring it forward by another 15 minutes.
 4. Keep on doing this until you have reached the bedtime you want (for example, 8:30pm).

Be patient. If you move bedtime too quickly, your child may be unable to fall asleep.

Sam’s Bedtime						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
		10:00	10:00	9:45	9:45	9:45
9:30	9:30	9:15	9:15	9:15	9:15	9:00
9:00	8:45	8:45	8:30			

Get morning light

Morning light also helps set an earlier bedtime and helps keep the body clock on the right track. Open the curtains in the bedroom, eat breakfast in a sunny area, or spend some time outdoors.

Be consistent

Keep trying for a number of nights, and encourage others caring for your child to use the same strategies. Being consistent will increase your chances of success with improving your child’s sleep patterns.

Bedtime Pass

For children who have a difficult time staying in their bedroom or call out frequently, making a Bedtime Pass may be helpful. Your child can use their Bedtime Pass for one trip out of their room or one visit from you after you have said “Goodnight”.

Explain the bedtime pass to your child

1. **Sit down with your child** and explain what you are going to do.
2. **Explain that your child is having difficulty** going to sleep on their own and that you have come up with an idea of how to help (for example, *“I know it’s hard for you to go to sleep so I have thought of an idea for you”*).
3. **Explain the strategy** - say something like *“You and I are going to make a pass for you to use every night. You will get one pass per night. After Mum or Dad has put you to bed you can use the pass for one free trip out of the room, for a reason such as if you want to give Mum or Dad one last hug or you need a drink. If you do use the pass you need to give it to Mum or Dad and go straight back to bed”*. Stress that it needs to be a short, specific reason (5 minutes or less).
4. **Explain what happens after** the child has used the pass, for example, *“After you use your pass, you need to go back to bed and stay there for the rest of the night”*.

Bedtime Pass

Exchange for one short trip out of your bedroom after bedtime.

Make the pass

You and your child should then make the pass.

You can use cardboard or note cards cut to about the size of a small photograph as long as the pass is sturdy.

Allow your child to colour in or write on the pass to make it their own.

At bedtime

Just before bed, hand the pass to your child and remind them of its purpose. Follow your typical bedtime routine and then leave the room.

If your child asks to use the pass, allow this and then take the pass. Send your child back to bed and remind them that that it is time to stay in the room and be quiet.

For the first few nights when you are using the pass, remind your child of the rules of using the pass, give them the pass and follow the same routine.

What if my child calls out or comes out of their room AFTER using the pass?

If your child calls out: Ignore this behaviour – even if it gets worse.

If your child comes out: Take them back to bed with no or little talking.

Rewards

Remember to reward your child for being able to use the bedtime pass and stay in their room after that. Reward good behaviour in the morning, as rewards can really motivate a child to improve their behaviour. Rewards work best when given soon after the behaviour not after a few days. See the *Rewards handout* for more ideas.

TIP: HAVE A CONSISTENT AND CALMING BEDTIME ROUTINE

Being consistent is very important to help children wind down and be ready to fall asleep. These, and other habits for good sleep are discussed in the Good Sleep Habits handout.

TIP: HAVE A REGULAR BEDTIME

This will help set your child's internal body clock so they are ready for sleep when it is time for bed.

If your child is not falling asleep at a suitable time, start by taking them to bed at the time they usually fall asleep, and gradually make bedtime earlier. See the Bedtime Fading handout for more details.

Rewards

Rewards can really motivate a child to improve their behaviour. They work best if given soon after the behaviour not after a few days. After a couple of weeks, they may not work as well but by then you hope your child's behaviour has improved!

Reward charts are appropriate for children 3 years and over.

Setting up a reward system

1. Set up a chart:

- **Create it:** You can choose from lots of different styles of charts, or make one yourself. Older children might like to create their own chart, perhaps with a drawing or photo of the reward they're trying to earn. You can also download free charts from the internet. E.g. try searching for "reward charts to colour in"
- **Place it:** Put the chart where your child can see it. Keep in mind that your older child might prefer a spot that's private – for example, their bedroom, instead of on the fridge.

2. Rewards:

- **Decide which stickers or tokens to use:** star stickers work well for younger children, whereas older kids might like points or other markers.
- **Keep rewards small and cheap** e.g. stickers, stamps. It is not necessary for rewards to be or expensive, but rather a small symbol that you are happy with your child's behaviour.
- **Choose short-term rewards:** Most children start by liking the idea of collecting stickers or tokens, but the novelty can wear off quite quickly.

When this happens, swapping the stickers or tokens for some short-term rewards can help them keep their eyes on the main prize. You could let your child choose from a range of objects, events and activities – for example, getting to choose an activity for special time with mum or dad, e.g. a trip to the park, a family bike ride, going to the swimming pool, or watching a favourite movie (but not just before bed!).

- Try not to make food the reward
- You can build on rewards e.g. 4 stickers = a lucky dip (remember to keep the prizes small and cheap) or a trip to the park or a choice of DVD after dinner.

Rewarding your child

1. **Choose the behaviour you want to encourage:** Use clear and positive descriptions of the behaviour, and talk with your child about the behaviour you want to see.
2. **Increase your child's chance of success to begin with:** Make sure your child has a chance to get a few rewards over the first few days e.g. at first you may reward them for staying in their room at the start of the night. Once they can do this, you may then reward them only if they stay in their room the whole night.
3. **Give the reward as soon as possible after the good behaviour:** e.g. first thing in the morning. Some specific praise reminds your child why they're getting a sticker or token. For example, "I really like the way you stayed in your bed the whole night. Here is a star for your chart".
4. **NEVER take away a reward:** If your child has earned it, they keep it! If your child doesn't earn a star, just move on. Focus on encouraging your child to try again.



Name

is going to try to remember to...



Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday