

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.

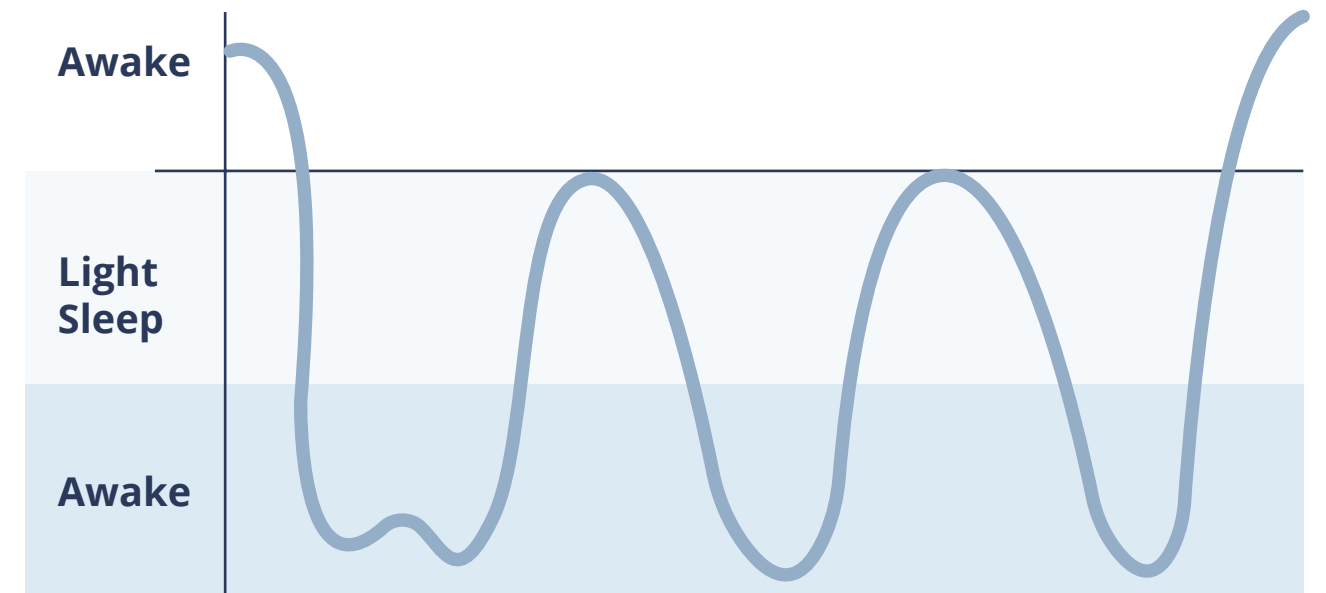
DID YOU KNOW

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:

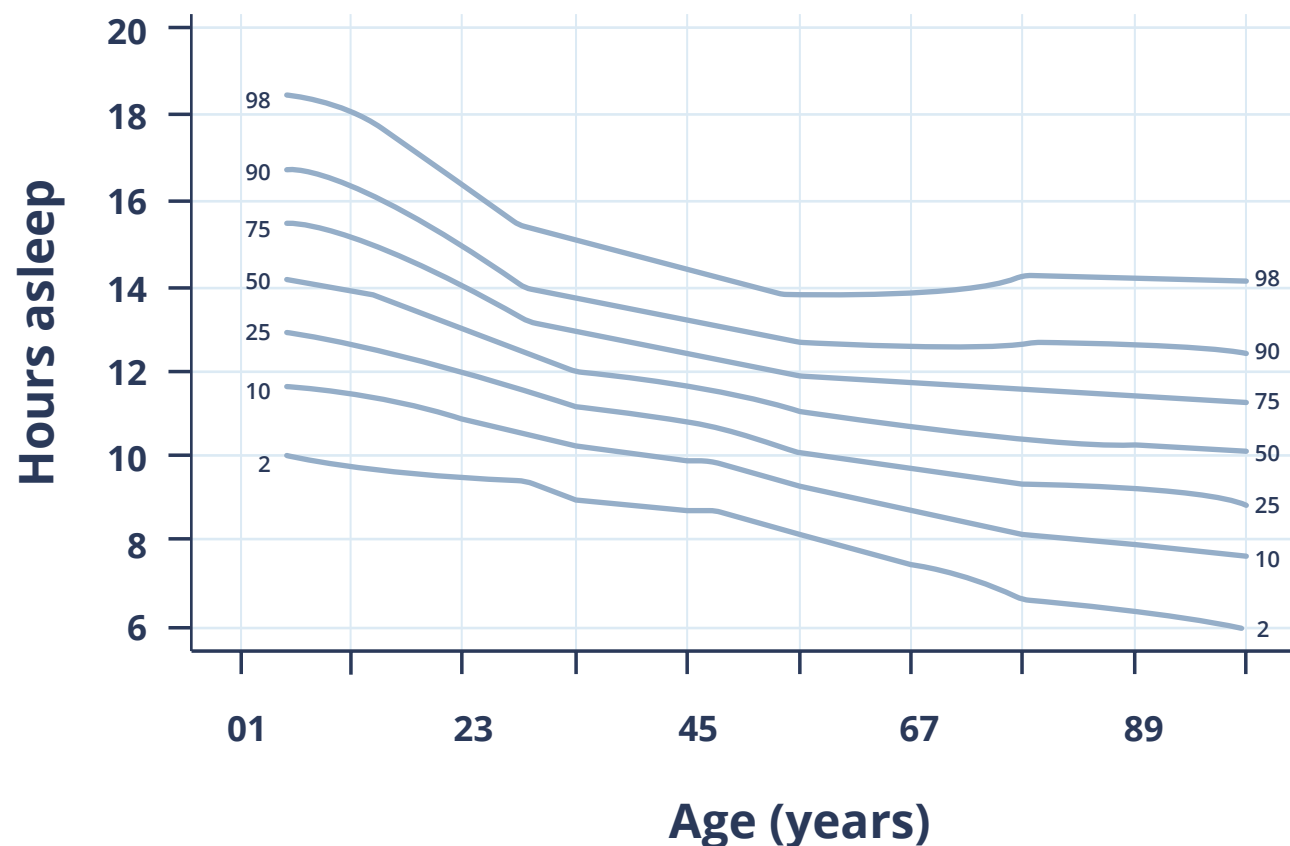
- Important for restoring the body
- A time when essential hormones for growth and development are released

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.

Nightmares and Night terrors

Nightmares are frightening dreams that usually wake your child. In a **night terror** your child suddenly becomes agitated, perhaps crying or screaming, looking panicked, sweating and inconsolable – however, this does not usually wake your child.

Although they seem similar, there are differences in why they happen and how best to manage them.

Nightmares vs Night terrors

They are both common in children and usually don't mean anything is wrong. They are more likely to happen if your child is sick or overtired.

Nightmares:

- Nightmares are frightening dreams that usually wake your child
- Usually happen after midnight
- Remembered next morning in light sleep
- Your child wakes up fully
- Your child may be upset and want to be comforted.

Night Terrors:

- From a deep sleep, your child suddenly becomes agitated perhaps crying, looking panicked, sweating and inconsolable
- Usually happen before midnight
- Not remembered next morning
- Between deep & light sleep cycles
- Your child's body is awake but their mind is not
- Your child may be inconsolable, not responding to soothing or comforting.

Managing nightmares

Some tips on what to do when your child has a nightmare:

- 1. Comfort your child:** Talk to them quietly and give them a hug. Following most nightmares, your child will be reassured by a few minutes of comfort. Let them know that you are nearby and will make sure that they are safe and secure. Most children are still tired after a nightmare and will fall back to sleep.
- 2. Give your child a security object:** A soft toy or blanket that your child can keep in bed can help them feel more relaxed through the night.
- 3. Leaving the light on:** If your child asks to have a light on, put it on the lowest setting possible or use a night light so that your child can fall back to sleep.
- 4. If happening often, discuss it the next day:** Most of the time nightmares are events with little meaning, but if your child begins to have them often, it can be helpful to figure out what is worrying them.
- 5. Encourage the use of imagination:** Some children do well using their imagination to reassure themselves. For example, your child could draw pictures of their bad dreams and then throw them away, or try to imagine different endings to their nightmares.

Talk to your health professional

If your child's nightmares are severe, meaning that they happen often and are causing anxiety problems for your child during the day and at bedtime, speak to your family GP.

Managing night terrors

Night terrors are scary to watch but usually harmless to children!

1. Keep your child safe: The most important thing to do when your child has a night terror is to keep your child safe. Make sure that all outside doors and windows are secure, that all doors and gates are locked and that areas such as stairs are blocked. Also, as your child may walk or run around during a night terror, clear away anything that they can step on or trip over.

2. Do not wake your child: Generally, nothing is gained by trying to awaken a child during a night terror, and sometimes doing so can make a child more upset. Also, if they wake up completely you may have problems getting them back to sleep.

3. Guide your child back to bed: To encourage return to normal sleep, guide your child gently back to bed. If they resist, let them remain where they are but do not leave your child.

4. Try not to interfere too much: The normal response of parents is to try and comfort their child during a night terror. Try to resist doing this. Most children will just get more agitated. Remember, they will not even remember this event in the morning. However, if your child is about to come to harm be sure to keep them safe even if they fight you.

5. Ensure enough sleep: Increase the amount of sleep that your child is getting and try to stop them getting over tired. Night terrors are much more likely to happen when your child does not get enough sleep.

6. Maintain a regular bedtime: Night terrors are more likely to happen on nights when your child goes to sleep at a different time than usual. Therefore, stick to a set bedtime for your child, taking in to account the possible need for increased sleep.

7. Do not discuss night terrors the next day: The morning after an event, do not make a point of discussing the episode with your child, as it is most likely they will not remember it. Discussing the event is likely to worry them. However, if on the rare occasion they do remember and bring it up, simply reassure them that they were safe and that you were looking after them.