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Sleepless Everywhere

Keep your kids rested to maximize their learning potential.

While children, like adults, vary in the amount of sleep they need, how quickly they fall asleep, as well as how long it takes to resettle once they wake during the night, today's kids are a decidedly groggy group. A poll released earlier this year by the National Sleep Foundation (NSF) found that more than two-thirds of children sleep less than they should — less than even their parents realize. Many fail to meet the minimum recommended hours during a 24-hour period. What's going on?

• The Sleep-Challenged Child

Blame it on biology and lifestyle. Children's sleep problems run the gamut from a reluctance to go to bed in the first place, night-wakings, and nightmares, to sleepwalking, bedwetting, or obstructive sleep apnea, a condition marked by a brief period when breathing stops.

When kids hit puberty and adolescence, they actually need more, not less, sleep — and not getting it can have serious consequences for learning, long-term memory, and safety. In the mid-'90s, a Brown University survey of 3,000 Rhode Island high-school students revealed that, on average, teens were sleeping 7.3 hours each night. Fifteen percent slept 8.5 hours and a whopping 26 percent managed only 6.5 hours or less. With sports practices and games, homework, and social activities jamming weekends, they're not catching up then, either.

• How Much Is Enough?

While it's become a point of pride to brag about how little sleep we need to feel rested, many people underestimate the number of hours they need. Research at the National Center on Sleep Disorders at The National Institutes of Health (NIH) shows that children who regularly sleep nine hours perform better in school, are happier, suffer fewer accidents, and are less likely to develop weight or emotional problems later on than those who try to function on less.

As kids enter the teenage years, physiological changes in the brain that regulate sleep and waking literally hardwire them to stay up longer and sleep later. Unfortunately, that's precisely the time they must be at school. (A high schooler's day often starts before 7 a.m. — when the students' bodies are there, but their brains are still asleep.) Add homework, sports activities, music lessons, TV, and chatting with friends online, and most kids have little time to catch up on sleep.

• Rest for the Weary

Unfortunately in our fast-paced, multitasking society, sleep is low on most people's priority list. Teach the importance of sleep to your children — the earlier the better — and you'll find that most nighttime problems are transient and treatable. To maximize restful sleep:

- **Calculate his sleep needs.** Most school-age children need nine or 10 hours of sleep. But everyone is different, and insisting that a child go to sleep when he's not tired is a recipe for disaster.
- **Cut caffeine.** Check the label on that new flavor of cola, water, or sports drink. Cola drinks may contain as much as 23 mg of caffeine. Ditto for iced tea. Chocolate milk? That'll be 5 mg; a chocolate candy bar, 6 mg. A small scoop of coffee ice cream packs a whopping 58 mg. After 2 p.m., decaf your kids.
- **Establish calming bedtime rituals.** That means no stimulating activities, such as watching TV, playing video games, or even surfing the Web for at least a half-hour before lights out. After a shower or bath, suggest snuggling under the covers and chatting quietly, or allowing her to read or listen to quiet music or an audio-book.
- **Keep him moving.** Exercise is critical, but not close to bedtime — three hours before bedtime at the latest.
- **Hone time-management skills.** As the [homework load](#) increases and time is eaten up by extracurricular activities, many preteens and teens find it hard to figure out just how long that English paper will take — and they stay up very late to do it. Insisting that a teen turn his light out at 11 p.m. will get you nowhere fast. Better to have him learn from experience that he probably won't get a good grade on a paper that was written at 2 a.m. the night before it was due.

Recommended Products for Your Child Ages 8-10

The Magic School Bus: Get Ages: 6-9 \$2.80	Nate the Great Ages: 5-8 \$4.50	Special Edition Harry Pot Ages: 9-99 \$70.00	Diary of a Wimpy Kid Valu Ages: 8-13 \$68.49	Everything You Need to Kn Ages: 9-12 \$7.99	Sister Magic #1: The Tro Ages: 7-9 \$2.99	Hippopotamus Ate the Teac Ages: 5-8 \$2.99	Scholastic Reader Level 3 Ages: 6-9 \$3.19	Harry Potter and the Sorc Ages: 9-99 \$9.09	Sch Age \$3.1
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