

Parent sleep facts and resources

As a parent there many things that we have to teach our kids. Be polite.....eat your veggies.....do your homework.....be a good sport.....etc. etc. They are very busy, with school and homework., movies to watch, games to play, sports and clubs, friends and family. Lots to do on the weekends. So where does sleep come into all this?

- Infants can't stop it
- Toddlers and preschoolers don't want it
- School aged children think it's cool not to get it
- Adolescents don't care if they get it
- We want more of it but can't get it
- Our parents have time for it but often can't do it.

At your child's age, sleep is as important for development as eating and breathing. As a growing person, your child needs a lot of sleep (about 9 - 12 hours per night) because they are growing at a very fast rate. They may not be getting that much sleep and if they are not they may be 'deprived' of sleep. What happens then?

Here are the ten most asked questions from parents about children's sleep problems.

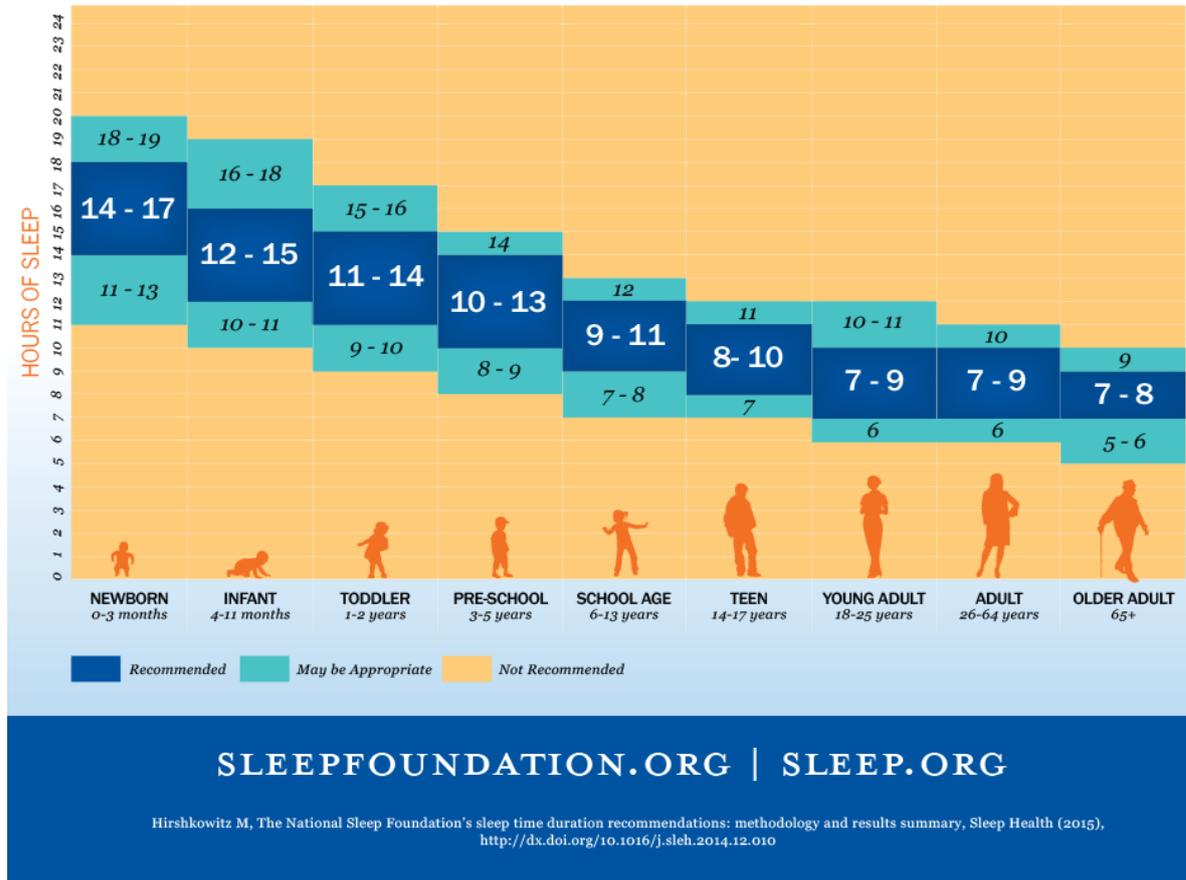
1. When does a sleep problem become a sleep disorder?

If sleep problems are frequent, result in either poor quality or less quantity of sleep and when they start to affect the child and the family then the sleep problem has become a sleep disorder.

2. How much sleep should my child be getting?

If your preschool child had finished daytime naps then they will usually need about 11 hours of night time sleep. At school they usually need between 10-12 hours in junior school and about 9 hours in senior school. See the table below, from the American National Sleep Foundation to see the range of healthy sleep for your child.

SLEEP DURATION RECOMMENDATIONS



3. *What are some good ways to make sure my child gets enough sleep?*

Put in place good sleep habits (sleep hygiene). Try and make sure bedtime is regular, stop watching TV or playing computer games 30-60 minutes before bed.

4. *Bedtime is always stressful - how can I get my young child to bed at night? – they do not want to go.*

Instead of arguing with your child, try giving them some choices about bedtime. Try and find something they would like to do during bedtime routine. Maybe offer them the choice of reading or talking with you, or reading one or two books. This will be dependent on calm behaviour. With the promise of a calming bedtime routine, preferably enjoying time with one or both parents, your child is more likely to want to go to bed without as much resistance. Try the Boss of My Sleep Book

5. *My child likes to watch TV to go to sleep - is this a good thing to put into the calming pre-bedtime routine?*

Television puts a lot of people to sleep but if there is a sleep problem then television should be avoided close to bedtime – it competes for sleep time and can excite the brain and affect the sleeping hormones so that getting to sleep is harder. There are healthier options for getting to sleep.

6. *Does lack of sleep affect my child's ability to learn?*

The short answer is absolutely. Without sufficient sleep your child will not be able to concentrate and absorb the things they must learn every day. With chronic sleep problems, this could lead to falling behind at school and even repeating class. This has been shown in many studies.

7. *What role does dream sleep play in learning?*

There are two types of sleep. Rapid Eye Movement Sleep (REM), which is when we dream, and Non Rapid Eye Movement sleep (NREM). NREM sleep is deep and restful sleep which your child needs a lot of because they are growing. REM has been linked to learning and we believe that REM sleep is NECESSARY to learn – it makes our learning turn into memory and knowledge. REM sleep is more frequent in children probably because they are learning so much. If your child is not getting enough REM sleep they will not learn as fast. Poor sleep = less sleep = less REM sleep = worse learning.

8. *How do you know the difference between a nightmare and a night terror?*

Nightmares are dreams. Children are asleep and will often wake from them, remember them and show genuine fright. They will seek reassurance and will get it. They usually happen in the early morning.

Night terrors are not dreams. The child is not awake, is not conscious and does not know or remember what is happening. They will not be reassured and usually don't like to be touched. Even if they are very frightening to the parent, the child is not ill and it will generally be over without intervention. In rare cases these may go on for more than 5 minutes. They will usually happen in the first three hours of the night. If you are unsure if it is a nightmare or a night terror, just go and watch and wait for a reaction. If your child reacts to you being there then they are probably awake.

9. *Should you wake up a child who is having a night terror?*

No. The child is not awake, despite all appearances. If you wake them or consistently ask them what is the matter until they wake, they will wake from sleep and see worried faces around them and may become frightened because of it. They may think something is wrong with them. Waking a child from a night terror can also make it last longer.

10. *How do I get my child to stop using their screens and phones at bedtime.*

Sleep patterns go crazy during your teenage years. Many teens have the energy to play computer games until late at night but can't find the energy to get out of bed in time for school. Boys are particularly likely to play video games late into the night. Girls are more likely to use and engage with social media late at night. It is hard as parents to understand these fascinations. The light in those screens is very detrimental to sleep because it fools the body into thinking it is still day time. Those screens need to be off and preferably out of the room. Negotiating with young people about when to shut off their screens before they try and fall asleep is a very important role for parents.

11. *How do I get my infant to learn to self settle.*

The Sensible Sleep Solution: a guide to sleep in your baby's first year": Parenting book about infant sleep - *"This book is different from the numerous other books about baby sleep". Independent reviewer, Monash University, Australia*

- This is NOT about using controlled crying.
- Practical and informative guide for parents about sleep in the first year
- Based on research and scientific evidence but in understandable language
- Written by psychologists with input from young and new mothers, nurses and midwives
- Available for purchase on [Amazon](#) or in your local bookstore.

12. *Can I get some assistance with my child's sleep?*

The Adelaide-based Paediatric Sleep & Psychology Clinic has been working with families for over 15 years to successfully treat sleep problems in children 0-18 years. We have both:

- individual sessions, online and face to face. Please call (08) 8125 48 30
- group sessions for parents and carers of children with sleep problems which aim to give parents enough basic strategies to overcome the most common sleep problems in children. Please contact Brooke Michell – brookemichell@adam.com.au