

# Sleeping Your Way to Better Mental Health

## The Importance of Sleep

### Sleep matters!

For Our Bodies: promotes growth, repair/renewal & overall health while helping to prevent illness.

For Our Brains: strengthens brain connections that enhance memory, attention, problem solving, and performance.

For Our Mental & Emotional Health: strengthens brain connections involved in emotional regulation, resilience to stress, & helps minimize negative mood and behavioral states.

### What if Kids Don't Get Good Sleep?

They may develop sleep deprivation which can have negative impacts on both physical and mental health.

### Warning Signs of Sleep Deprivation in School Aged Kids

- Feeling tired in the mornings or after lunch.
- Feeling more irritable than usual.
- Falling asleep in school.
- Having less energy than usual.
- Having difficulty concentrating or remembering.

## We Need Sleep Quantity and Quality

Each person's sleep needs are different. The right amount for each individual typically falls somewhere within this range:

Age	Hours of Sleep Needed
School aged children (6-12)	9-12
Teenagers (13-18)	8-10
Adults (18+)	7+

### How does the amount of sleep we get impact our sleep quality?

The different phases of sleep we go through provide different benefits:

- Light Sleep (Stages 1 & 2) is where muscle activity slows down and our body starts to cool.
- Deep Sleep (stages 3&4) is where we get physical renewal such as healing, cell regeneration & tissue repair.
- REM sleep (the dreaming phase) is where we get cognitive, emotional & mental renewal.



The majority of our REM sleep occurs during hours 5-8; for good mental health, we need enough sleep hours to ensure we get enough REM sleep!

## Factors that Affect Sleep

- Light (especially the blue part of the light spectrum) and darkness help regulate our sleep-wake cycle; they are the signals that tell our brain when to sleep and when to wake up. We sleep best when we are exposed to bright light during the day, dim light leading up to sleep, and darkness during sleep.
- Mental health conditions (children with ADHD, mood or anxiety disorders or Autism Spectrum Disorder experience more sleep problems). Anything we can do to improve mental health will have a positive impact on sleep. Likewise, good sleep can positively impact mental health.
- Medical factors such as medications, sleep disorders, and certain medical conditions.
- Developmental stages including growth spurts.
- Family relationships.
- Sleep hygiene (sleep habits).

### Why is Sleep Difficult for Teens?

Sleep and teens often don't get along! Teens average less than 7 hours of sleep a night. Reasons include irregular sleep schedules, increased caffeine intake and technology use, as well as changes to their biological clock that reprogram them to have later sleep onset time and later wake up time.

## Sleep Hygiene Strategies

The first step to getting a good night's sleep is having good sleep habits. Key ingredients of good sleep hygiene are:

### Sleep Scheduling

This includes:

#### Creating an age appropriate sleep schedule

- When should bedtime be? Determine how many hours of sleep your child needs (from the typical range on the sleep quantity chart) and count backwards from the time they need to wake up.
- How do you know where your child fits within in the range of sleep hours needed? Try letting them wake naturally (i.e. without an alarm clock) for several days to see how many hours they sleep for. That's what their body currently needs. If the amount of sleep varies from day to day, talk to a health professional about keeping a more detailed sleep diary over a longer period of time.

- Support your child to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. Consistency is key to good sleep!
- Regular daytime naps should be phased out for school aged children.

Remember: Falling asleep is a learned skill – give it time! Make adjustments to sleep schedules slowly (i.e. adjust by 15 minute increments each day until you reach the appropriate bedtime).



#### Establishing a Consistent Bed Time Routine

- Establish a short bed time schedule (i.e. 30 – 45 minutes long) that provides predictability for your child, while promoting independence by allowing for flexibility and choice. A regular routine can help your family stay on track.
- A typical bedtime schedule might include a light snack, a quick bath, brushing teeth, putting on pajamas, and reading a story.

#### **Preparing for Sleep**

What we do during the day can impact how well we sleep:

- Strive to be active during the day. Bright light and physical activity during the day can support the sleep-wake cycle.
- Minimize activities that cause arousal or overstimulation close to bedtime.
- Avoid heavy exercise 2 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid bright light before bed by dimming lights and using window coverings in the house.
- Choose a nutritious bedtime snack of at least two food groups to eat at the start of the bedtime routine. Children require frequent meals and snacks to meet their nutritional requirements. A healthy bedtime snack that contains at least two food groups provides the fuel needed for quality sleep. Avoid caffeine (such as pop, tea, coffee, or chocolate) before bedtime.
- Relaxation activities such as yoga, meditation, massage, and mindfulness can be helpful to reduce stress and anxiety at bedtime. Some people find certain smells to be calming, such as chamomile or lavender.
- Avoid or limit exposure to things that cause stress and worry (e.g. try to have homework completed earlier in the evening).

#### **Sleep Environment**

The bedroom should be comfortable, and used primarily for sleep. Tips for a good sleep environment include:

- The bedroom should be dark when sleeping. Try using dark window coverings (i.e. blackout blinds), and limiting other lights sources in the bedroom at night.
- Night lights that give off an orange hue of light are best as these type of lights limit the blue part of the spectrum.
- Temperature is another factor that helps to regulate our sleep. A temperature of 20-22° Celsius is ideal for sleep.

#### **Technology and Sleep**

##### **How does technology impact our sleep?**

- When we spend more time on a screen there is less time for sleep.
- Electronic devices such as mobile phones, computers, tablets, and TV emit blue light. Blue light interferes with melatonin production and disrupts our sleep/wake cycle.
- Viewing stimulating content can make sleep more difficult.
- Nighttime notifications and texts can disrupt your sleep.

##### **What can we do?**

- Limit or remove technology use 1-2 hours before bedtime and take technology out of kids' bedrooms.
- Make sure technology is set to night mode so alerts and notifications don't disrupt sleep
- In the evening, try using night mode settings or apps on devices that change screens to a dimmer, orange hue

#### **Resources**

- Healthy Living, Healthy Minds, A Toolkit for Families: <http://keltymentalhealth.ca>
- Teenagers and sleep: <http://sleepeducation.org/healthysleep/sleep-recharges-you-teen-sleep-duration>
- National Sleep Foundation: [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)
- Canadian Sleep Society: <https://css-scs.ca/>
- Sleep Education: [www.sleepeducation.org](http://www.sleepeducation.org)
- Sleep for Kids: [www.sleepforkids.org](http://www.sleepforkids.org)
- Call Health Link Alberta at 811
- Call for community resources at 211