



Learn about Sleep

with

SIMPLYHEALTHY@SCHOOLS

Dear parents and caregivers,

Philips' SimplyHealthy@Schools is a worldwide sustainability program to teach children how to improve their health and well-being in a simple way.

The 'power of sleep' is a module in the SimplyHealthy@Schools-program. It is based on important research about children and sleep from the Australian Centre for Education in Sleep (www.sleepeducation.net.au).

In this hand out, we would like to give you some extra information about:

- how much sleep your child needs;
- what can happen if your child misses out on sleep;
- how to take care of good sleep hygiene and help your child fall asleep more easily.

This information might not be new to you, but if you think your child could use some extra help getting a good night's rest, we are happy to provide some useful tips.

1. How much sleep does your child need?

Primary school children need 10 to 12 hours of sleep each night to stay healthy, happy and be able to perform in school at their best.

Their body needs sleep:

- to rest and recharge;
- to grow (new cells are made, growth hormone is released during sleep);
- to repair cells (fixing bruises and injuries);
- to keep the immune system strong and to fight off illnesses.

Their brain also needs sleep:

- to store information it gets during the day and remember it;
- to be able to pay attention and concentrate during the day;
- to be able to learn new insights and skills;
- for problem solving.

2. What can happen if your child misses out on sleep?

If your child is regularly missing the full 10 to 12 hours of sleep, your child can show the following problems:

- behaviour – aggressive, antisocial, withdrawn, hyperactive, uncontrolled;
- emotions – moody, depressed, anxious, stressed, uneasy, insecure, irritable;
- planning – poorly organised, repeating grades, forgetting lessons;
- concentration – inattentive, unable to concentrate, falling behind in school;
- creativity – not working at full potential;
- problem solving – poor behaviour control and difficulty in social situations;
- complicated thinking – struggling with mathematics, sciences, languages, abstract concepts;

- physical coordination – less sporty, accident prone, clumsy;
- weight – obesity and overweight issues are more likely to occur with less sleep;
- health – poorer immune system, sicker more often.

3. How to take care of good sleep hygiene and help your child fall asleep more easily?

Children can have difficulties falling asleep or staying asleep during the night. Up to 40% of children and adolescents experience some form of sleep problem growing up.

Sleep problems can have internal causes (such as nightmares, night terrors, bedwetting and snoring). But they can also be related to external influences such as the sleep environment, the food and drink your child consumes before going to bed and the activities of your child before going to bed. Most sleep problems are caused by external factors and can be solved with good sleep hygiene.

Sleep environment

Your child sleeps much better in a room where he or she feels comfortable and has a bed routine that is predictable. To help your child get a good night's sleep, you can think of the following:

- regular bed and wake times;
- no television or computer games before bed, and no screens in the bedroom;
- avoidance of other activities that 'stimulate' your child such as exercise too close to bedtime;
- positive attributes to help a child fall asleep on their own include a comfort toy, a night light (to reduce fear of the dark) and a consistent, gentle and loving bedtime routine;
- it is also important for your child's bio-rhythm that the bedroom is not too bright - try to let your child get used to the dimly lit room to assist in falling asleep.

Food and drink

Eating and drinking right before bedtime can easily keep your child from falling asleep; especially food and drink that contains sugar or caffeine (like fizzy or sports drinks that contain caffeine). Make an agreement with your child about eating and drinking before bedtime, for example: no eating an hour before you go to sleep and only drink water or warm milk before bedtime.

Eating and drinking in bed or in the bedroom should be avoided. It is not hygienic and your child should learn that the bed is a place to sleep, not to consume food or drink.

Bedtime behaviour

Most children need to unwind a little before they are able to fall asleep. You can easily help your child to find a suitable routine for this. Don't allow your child to play computer games, watch television, call friends or do similar activities that will excite them before bed. Instead, help your child to relax and unwind before going to bed, for example by letting him/her take a hot shower or warm bath, read a book together or talk about the day he/she had at school.

Although times have changed, try to keep televisions, computers, game-consoles, mobile phones and music players out of your child's bedroom, at least at night. They don't need them when they sleep and it will help them resist temptation to secretly do other things instead of sleeping!

We hope that these tips will give you some inspiration to take care of your child's night rest. Although your child will not always be grateful for your efforts, a good night's sleep is one of the most important conditions to allow your child to become a strong, smart, healthy and happy adult.

Good luck!

Australian Centre for Education in Sleep
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