

SLEEP and HEALTH

Getting enough sleep is an essential part of a healthy lifestyle - equal to eating well and being active. For overall health and well-being, as well as for success at work and school, a good night's sleep (7 to 8 hours for adults, 9 to 12 hours for children) is the amount recommended by medical experts.

What the research says

Too little sleep has been linked to overeating and overweight, increased risk of diabetes and heart problems, and more depression in adults. For children, recent research suggests:

- In a study of 8,000 preschoolers, less than 11 hours sleep was linked to lower literacy and early math skills. Bedtime routines can be an important way to make a significant impact on children's preparation for school success.
- Getting less sleep at night seems to make a healthy growth pattern more difficult. In several studies of hundreds of children, fewer hours of nighttime sleep was associated with a greater chance of being overweight. Daytime napping had no effect on weight.
- Children who do not get the age-appropriate amount of sleep can behave somewhat like hyperactive children. For youth diagnosed with ADD or ADHD, improvements in sleep routines can dramatically improve peer relations and classroom performance.

What your family can do

Create a sleep-friendly space.

- For smart sleeping habits, the most important issue is to keep screen entertainment (TV, DVD, video games, etc.) out of children's bedrooms.
- Make the room as conducive to quiet sleep as possible. Dark and comfortable are the keys, without too much clutter on the bed (a few stuffed animals, not an entire zoo).

Get into a relaxing, consistent bedtime routine.

- Smart parents know that a regular bedtime routine - at about the same time each night - is the best way to get kids settled down and ready to sleep through the night.
- A warm bath, reading a story, and cuddling with a favorite toy are soothing ways to let children know that it is time for sleep. Keep lights low and music gentle before bed.

Avoid all caffeine for children.

- Caffeine is a strong stimulant - increasing alertness and disrupting deep sleep. A recent study confirmed that the more caffeine children consumed, the less they slept.
- Soft drinks and bottled teas that contain caffeine are not appropriate for children. To see the caffeine content of beverages, go to www.mayoclinic.com/health/caffeine/AN01211.