

Sleep advice for children

Information for parents and carers

Set an individualised bedtime

School-age children need between 9 and 12 hours of sleep each night, but there's a lot of variability in sleep needs and patterns. Most kids have patterns that don't change much, no matter what you do. An early riser will still get up early even if you put them to bed later and a night owl won't usually fall asleep until their body is ready. Know how much sleep your child needs in order to wake up refreshed and you can set an appropriate bedtime.

Set a wake-up time

If you know how much sleep your child needs and what time they go to bed, you can set a daily wake-up time. Allowing your child to sleep a little later on weekends and holidays is generous, but it can set you up for a longer night. Those extra hours of sleep will affect your child like jet-lag, making it hard for their body to feel tired at bedtime.

Turn off screens for an hour or two before bedtime

Research has shown that the light from a screen can interfere with the production of the hormone melatonin. Melatonin is an important piece of sleep-wake cycles. When melatonin levels are at their highest, most people are sleepy and ready for bed. This can be a time for reading a book, drawing, listening to an audio book or having a snack.

Introduce a calm routine before bedtime

Another hormone that plays a role in sleep is cortisol, also known as the "stress hormone." When cortisol levels are high, your child's body will find it difficult to go to sleep. It may be helpful to start a "winding down" routine 20 minutes before your child's bedtime.

Keeping activities calm (reading books, bath time), the lights dim, and the environment quiet can help reduce cortisol in your child's system.

Create a sleep-inducing environment

While a stuffed animal can make it easier for your child sleep, too many toys can make it harder. Soft sheets, room-darkening shades, and relative quiet can help your child differentiate between day and night, making it easier to fall asleep.

Fear of Hypos

Children with diabetes may worry about hypos in the night. It may help to let your child know that their body is designed to recognise hypos and most young people will wake up when having a hypo. 2-3 mild hypos per week are normal- it does not mean that you or your child are doing anything wrong.

The following strategies may be helpful if you or your child are worried about hypos in the night:

1. Scan last thing before going to sleep
2. Aim for the glucose levels to be within target range. Try not to aim for higher glucose at bedtime.
3. Use available resources/technology. For example, you can use alarms to prevent a hypo. Your diabetes team can help you access these.
4. Review your child's glucose trace in the morning and use this information to adjust their insulin dose.

You can reassure your child that severe hypos are rare. There should not be a need to check your child's blood glucose in the night unless they are unwell. Active diabetes management will help prevent a hypo. Please speak to your diabetes team if you need support.

Reduce the focus on sleep

Just like adults, kids can have trouble shutting their brains off for the night.

Instead of increasing that anxiety by insisting it's time to sleep, consider focusing more on the idea of relaxation and calming your child's body down.

Seek additional support

If, despite your best efforts, your child continues to have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep during the night or has nightmares or night terrors, it may be helpful to talk to their pediatrician/GP about your concerns.

Keep it cool

Your child's sleep cycle isn't just dependent on light (or the lack thereof), it's also sensitive to temperature. Melatonin levels help to regulate the drop of internal body temperature needed to sleep, but you can help regulate the external temperature. Don't bundle your child up too tightly or set the heat too high; typical room temperature or a little cooler is better to promote deep sleep.

