

GOODNIGHT

How well a child sleeps varies from one child to the next. There is no magic remedy to help your child sleep well. How do children sleep anyway? How much? And why? What can help? In this brochure, we try to go into these questions a little deeper.

WHY SLEEP?

During the night, we take in less information, so that everything can relax and recharge. This way, a child can afterwards be alert, fit and wide awake. The information we take in during the day will be processed and stored in our sleep.

DIFFERENT SLEEP PHASES

Children never sleep through and wake up regularly. A child's sleep cycle lasts three quarters of an hour, whilst an adult's sleep cycle can last for up to an hour and a half. During light sleep, babies are often restless and wake often. It is important for you to teach them how they can soothe themselves when they wake up. Putting your child to bed when he/she's awake can help to teach him/her to fall asleep without help.

HOW MANY HOURS?

The amount of sleep needed varies from child to child. When children get older, they will need less and less sleep. Children only have enough sleep if they can meet their sleeping needs. A baby, for instance, needs an average of 16 to 18 hours of sleep. A baby doesn't have a 24-hour rhythm and can't distinguish between day and night. The months and years thereafter, children's sleeping needs will change dramatically. There is no point in comparing children, as sleep depends on the development of their brains and this is slightly different for each child.

A FEW TIPS

1. FALLING ASLEEP IN BED

It is recommended to put your child to bed whilst he/she is awake, so he/she can learn to fall asleep on his/her own, rather than in your arms for instance. Otherwise, they might miss their parents too much when they wake up during the night.

2. SET TIMES

Going to bed at set times ensures predictability and clarity. Sleeping will probably be easier this way. The time to go to bed should be tailored to the child's age and is different for everyone, depending on the sleeping needs.

3. ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcing beforehand that it is nearly bedtime will also create predictability.

4. SET ROUTINE

A bedtime routine repeats the same steps in the same order right before going to bed. This helps your child to recognise when it's bedtime. It helps the transition from being awake to going to sleep and creates clarity. What shape this bedtime routine should take is entirely up to you and is typical to your family and your child. To ensure a smooth bedtime routine, it is best to create some calm beforehand. You can do this, for instance, by switching off the television and not doing anything too active anymore. Instead, you could play with puzzles, draw or do something similar. This gives the body the opportunity to wind down a little.

5. GOOD SLEEPING ENVIRONMENT

The ideal sleeping environment is a calm, noise-free, well-ventilated and darkened space with an average room temperature of 18 degrees.

6. BOUNDARIES

As a parent, try to make clear arrangements about sleeping. Be consistent and don't be distracted by your child's arguments and excuses to postpone bedtime, so make sure your child has been to the toilet, had a drink, etc. beforehand.

7. NO TELEVISION IN THE ROOM

A television will cause the brain to receive too many stimuli, leading to difficult and restless sleep. It is best not to use television as a means to make your child fall asleep.

8. NO SUGAR

Soft drinks or caffeinated drinks before bedtime can keep your child from sleeping.

9. POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

It is always good to point out to your child when he/she is falling asleep well and is sleeping through.

Many problems could be remedied with these tips. Please bear in mind that you can only know if a method is effective or not, when you have applied it for a few weeks in a row. The first night you will undoubtedly feel that the approach isn't working, and that the behaviour is getting increasingly worse. The behaviour will only improve after some time.

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