

Sleep

Support for children and young people who are struggling to get to sleep or stay asleep

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(PCT team & Sleep Practitioner registered with the Sleep Charity)



Sleep issues are extremely common and if you have a child with additional needs and sleep issues, bedtime can be tricky. Whether they struggle to communicate how they're feeling, have increased anxiety, sensory issues or social cueing problems, sleeping well may be difficult. For example, research estimates that between 40-80% of children and young adults with autism have sleep problems. If your child regularly has difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, it may be a sign of a sleep issue.

We will cover some topics which if used consistently should improve sleep;

- Sleep deprivation
- Sensory considerations
- Sleep cycles
- Sleepy foods
- Top tips
- Example bedtime routine
- Additional handouts on teen sleep

Should you require support over the phone at home you can call the

National Sleep Helpline on 03303 530 541

Sleep deprivation causes increased hyperactivity and other behavioural problems, as well as damaging physical and mental development.

Symptoms of sleep deprivation include;

- Anxiety
- Loss of memory
- Depression
- Stress/ Mood swings
- Over/under eating
- Issues with employment
- Lower attainment at school
- Relationship problems
- Psychosis
- Increased risk of heart problems
- Increased risk of diabetes
- Poor concentration
- Impaired decision making/reactions
- Reduced alertness
- Poor judgement
- Less impulse control – more risk taking behaviours
- Increased risk of substance misuse
- Increased symptoms of ADHD (if present)
- Easily over stimulated
- Less effective immune system
- Hypertension and joint pain

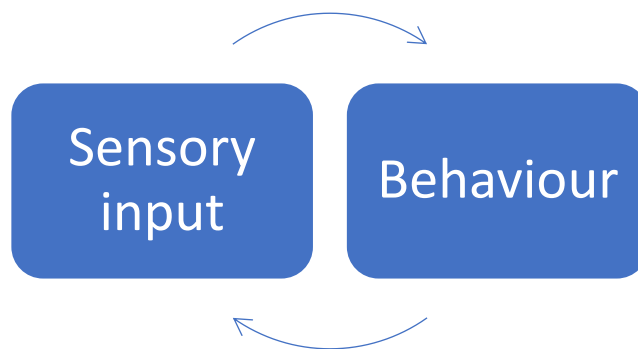
This can affect not only the child/young person struggling with sleep but also everyone in the house hold.

Sensory Considerations

Our senses are vital for our survival.

If a person has sensory impairments this can have a huge impact on how we interact with our surroundings.

Sensory input is processed by the brain and lets our body know how to react.



This process helps us to maintain position, level of alertness and our ability to move.

Smell



We have over 400 types of smell receptors in our nose. Closely linked to memory. Unlike taste, smell can be detected from a distance giving us advanced warnings.

Sleep tip Consider using scents to indicate different times of day eg; citrus in morning and lavender/sandalwood in evening

Taste



This system allows us to recognise five basic taste sensations: sweet, bitter, salty, sour and savoury. Our sense of taste gives us the ability to respond to food that provides us with the nutrients our bodies need to survive.

Sleep tip Trying a sleepy food before bed can help sleep. Brushing teeth may be a cause of stress – consider brushing teeth earlier or trying out new toothpaste

Touch



Touch/tactile senses give information through our skin. It interprets temperature, pain and pressure/light touch and is very important in keeping us well and safe from harm.

Sleep Tip Think about your pyjamas, bedding, pillow, mattress – are they comfortable? Some of us prefer to sleep on harder surfaces.

Sight



Vision is important for a lot of different skills including interacting with others, spotting danger or opportunities to play, eating, sleeping, finding things we need, reading, writing and playing sports.

Sleep Tip Dim lighting 1 hour before sleep. Some children prefer to sleep with a nightlight on. Reduce pictures/colours on bedroom walls.

Hear



The auditory system is responsible for converting sound waves into nerve impulses, which helps protect us from danger and engage with our environment.

Sleep Tip Calming music can aid sleep. If you listen to music to go to sleep remember to keep it on all night.

Interoception



Interoception helps us to discover how our body is feeling on the inside. It gives us the body sensations such as a growling stomach, dry mouth, tense muscles and racing heart.

Awareness helps us to experience much needed emotions such as hunger, fullness, thirst, pain, body temperature, need for the bathroom, relaxation, anxiety, sadness, frustration and safety.

Sleep Tip Sometimes our bodies internal messages get missed so check list before bed; do I need the toilet, a drink, a snack? Am I too warm/cold?

Proprioception



This sensory system has huge influence on our body awareness, identifying and grading both force and pressure. This sense helps us to coordinate our movements so we can walk, run, hop, skip, negotiate obstacles or kick an object with precision.

Sleep Tip Deep pressure can help some of us to calm before bed, try steam rolling? Remember try not to exercise in the hour before bed as this release's dopamine (happy hormone) meaning are bodies are not ready for rest.

Vestibular



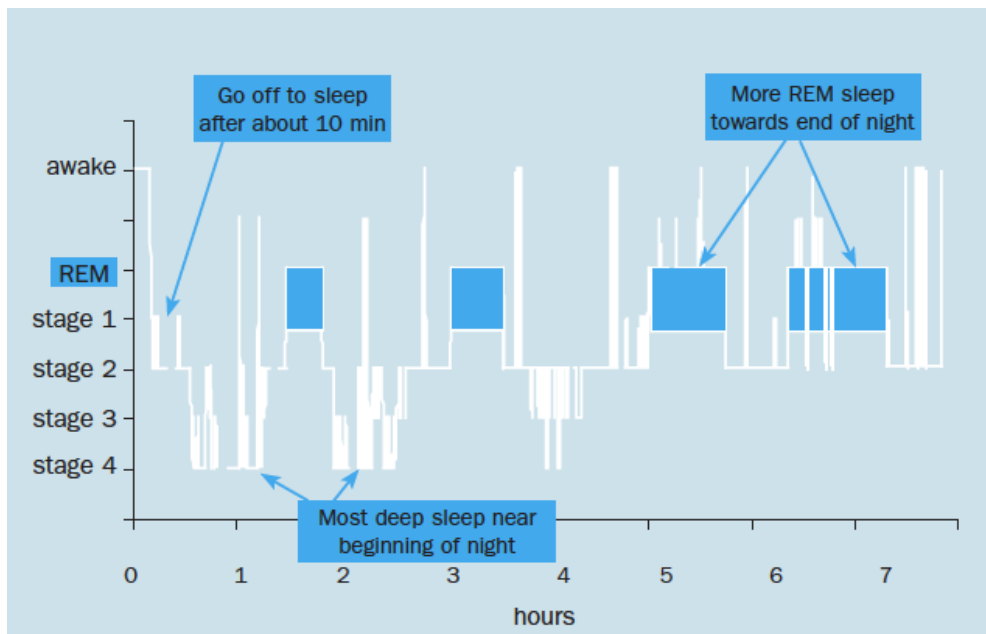
Our sense of movement and balance is known as our Vestibular sense. It is responsible for controlling our muscles, and most of our reflexes. The vestibular system is stimulated

by movement up or down, backward or forwards, and around or over.

Sleep Tip Repetitive rhythmic movements can help you to feel sleepy

Sleep Cycles

We sleep in 90-minute cycles – this means we partially wake every 90 mins during the night to check our surroundings.



This is a survival instinct to make sure we are safe during the night. (This was useful when we slept in caves to make sure no bear in our cave)

Therefore, **it is important to keep your surroundings the**



same from when you fall asleep to when you wake eg; if you go to sleep with music/light on – keep it on, heating going on during night can impact.

Sleep Tip Keep conditions the same from falling asleep to waking

Diet & Sleep

What your child eats during the day may impact on their ability to sleep at night.

A light snack in the hour before bedtime may be helpful for some children. Avoid heavy meals as this can make it more difficult to sleep. If your child is starting the day early consider whether this may be due to hunger. Consider natural sugar levels when providing snacks. Fruit and natural fruit juice contain sugar and too much of them too close to bed can provide a rush of energy. Avoid caffeine from late afternoon onwards. It is not only present in tea and coffee but can also be found in hot chocolate and fizzy drinks.

Below is a list of foods that may aid sleep, there still needs to be much more research in this area but many families share that they find this list helpful:

- **Almonds** contain magnesium which promotes both sleep and muscle relaxation. They also help to keep blood sugar levels stable overnight.



- **Bananas** are an excellent source of magnesium and potassium. They also contain tryptophan an amino acid that

helps us to sleep but don't forget fruit contains sugar too. Blend one banana with one cup of milk or soya milk to make an ideal bedtime drink.

- **Dairy, yogurt, milk and cheese** contain tryptophan helping us to nod off more easily. Calcium is effective in stress reduction and it's not true... cheese doesn't give you nightmares!




- **Cherries**, particularly tart cherries, have been found in one small study to naturally boost melatonin production. You could try drinking a glass of cherry juice (available at most natural foods stores) or a serving of fresh, frozen or dried cherries before bedtime.



- **Cereal** is not only a healthy snack but it may also help you snooze (look out for sugar content)

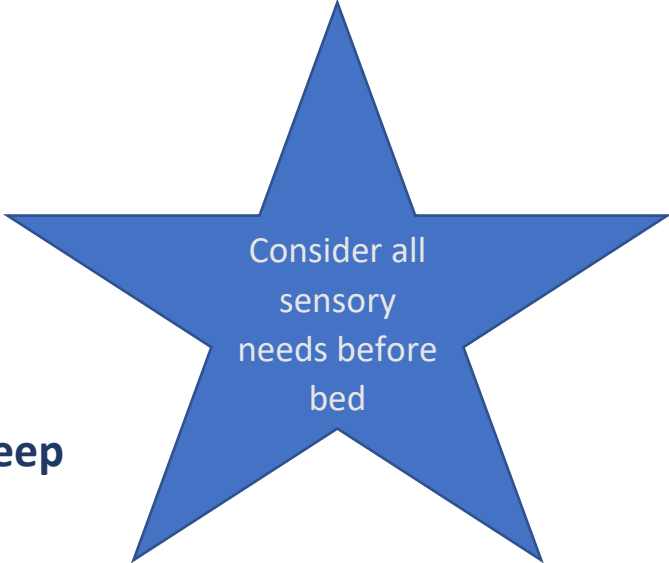
- **Complex carbohydrate**-rich foods increase the availability of tryptophan in the bloodstream. Avoid sugar-coated cereals though, these will give your child a sugar rush and wake them up






Wake times
are as
important as
sleep time

Top tips for Sleep




Consider all
sensory
needs before
bed

1. Going to sleep and waking at the **same time each day/night** for 21 days will help to reset your circadian rhythm
2. **Dimming lights 1 hour before** bed helps to inform your brain it is time to wind down
3. Any ***hand-eye coordination activities have a calming effect on the brain*** e.g. drawing, cutting and sticking, lego, puzzles
4. When you/your child falls asleep conditions should remain the same until waking
5. Avoid exercise for 1 hour before bed (Remember – exercising releases our happy hormones which makes it difficult for the body to switch off)



The
optimum
temperature
during sleep



Sleepy foods
before bed
increase
natural
melatonin

Bedtime Routine

8.00pm Dim lights to increase natural melatonin (from current location to bedroom)

8.05pm Offer sleepy food

8.15pm Hand eye coordination activity examples; drawing, puzzles, lego, painting, cutting and sticking, threading (model this activity if your child is resistant – leave this time open to have discussions about your day, model this too if your child struggles to speak openly)

8.30pm Upstairs to shower, bath, wash face and hands, brush teeth, change into pyjamas

8.45pm Reading, massage/steam rolling, meditation music

9.00pm Sleep time

***Times can be altered to suit best time for your child;
however routine time should remain the same**

Bedtime Routine – tips

Bedtime routines can be tricky to implement particularly as your child or young person gets older.

It is best to have a conversation about your child's sleep; explain this is not being done too them but for them.

Breaking down children's thoughts around sleep can often lead to interesting discussions.

Ensure where possible consistency for **at least 21 days** (some issues can take longer and require medical intervention).

Key points to remember;

- Sleep issues are common, higher for those with additional needs and higher for teenagers, but they can be improved
- Reduce stimulation in the hour before bed
- Personalise your bedtime routine with things you enjoy
- Stress hormones circulate around your body for up to 12 hours, inhibiting sleep

- You should go to bed at the same time every night and wake at same time every morning for 3 weeks to see an improvement
- Reframing bedtime as something positive is difficult but doable

More information can be found at

<https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/>