

## Parent / Carer Information

### Sleep (young children)

#### Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to help parents and carers to understand more about sleep for their child. Sleep is important for growth and physical health as well as concentration, memory and mood. The term 'sleep hygiene' means the habits that help infants and children to sleep well at all ages. However, when we sleep and how many hours we sleep changes a lot over time. There is a big range of what is normal for infants and children to sleep, but these are the average number of hours needed. It is important to remember that it is normal for children to wake briefly during the night.

#### Healthy sleep duration

Age: 4-12 months	12-16 hours (including naps)
Age: 1-3 years	11-14 hours (including naps)
Age: 3-5 years	10-13 hours (including naps)
Age: 5-13 years	9-12 hours

#### Routine

Having a set routine each night will help your child to settle and give them time to unwind and relax before they go to sleep. The routine should not be too long, (about 30 minutes before bedtime) and helps signal bed and allows your child to wind down. Whatever suits your family can be used but a bath or shower, music, or a bedtime story will all create a calm atmosphere.

Sticking to the same sleep schedule of bedtime and wake up time will help their body clock (circadian rhythm), and their body will be ready to go to bed at the same time each night.

#### Food and drink

On school nights, it may be better for your child to eat earlier but you can still eat as a family at weekends or during holiday times. It is helpful to avoid caffeinated drinks in the afternoon and before bedtime. Caffeine stays in the body for many hours, so energy drinks, tea, coffee, or cola drinks will

make it harder to fall asleep. Try to limit caffeinated drinks to fewer than two per day and avoid them in the afternoon and evening.

## Exercise

Daytime activity will really help your child to burn off energy and feel tired at the end of the day. Children who have been inactive may have difficulty falling asleep. It is helpful to encourage your child to play outside, play games and sports, or even just walk in the fresh air. Exercising very close to bedtime can stop children falling asleep quickly, but at any other time of the day it makes sleep deeper, with fewer night-time awakenings. Encouraging your child to get as much natural light as possible during the day is also good for sleep. It clearly signals the day and the night for the brain.

## Environment and technology

Your child's bedroom should be a place where they can relax and feel safe. The temperature and noise level should be comfortable. Some children prefer a nightlight and others like total darkness. Ideally, there should not be things to distract them, including too many toys on the bed. Electronic devices should not be used just before bedtime as they can prevent your child from settling to sleep and they should be removed from your child's bedroom. It helps if you set this as a clear family rule from the start.

## Self-settling

Children need to learn to self-settle, although it is very normal to cuddle and settle very young infants when they are still breastfeeding. Try to have good routines in place from an early age to help signal bedtime, even though it may be difficult to enforce and be emotionally difficult for both the parent and the child. If they wake and seek you out, gently return them to their bed straightaway. This may need to be repeated several times each night, but try to give the same response each time as this will help your child learn.

If your child is anxious, a night light or a cuddly toy may help them to feel safe and learn to self-settle. The use of reward charts and praising your child in the morning for staying in bed at night can help reinforce good behaviour. If children need an adult in the bedroom to fall asleep they are more likely to seek a parent if they wake in the night, so help your child to self-settle.

If they have worries that keep them awake, try to talk about them together during the day, well before bedtime. If they are old enough, encourage them to write down anxious thoughts and they could try to think about a possible solution.

## For further information

### Contact details

PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) for help, advice and information about NHS services. You can contact them on freephone 0800 032 02 02, e-mail [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk) or text to 0781 550 0015.

## Useful websites

BASIS <https://www.basionline.org.uk>

The children's sleep society <https://www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk/leaflets.php>

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