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Make sure your child gets enough sleep each night

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Okay, admit it; you find yourself allowing your children to stay up later at night. Then you let them sleep later in the morning. You are not alone. However, did you know the latest research is finding a strong link between a child's weight and the amount of sleep that young children get. Children who get less sleep are at risk for being overweight. A recent study found that with each extra hour of sleep, the risk of a young child's being overweight or obese dropped from 36 percent to 30 percent, while it reduced older children's risk from 34 percent to 30 percent.

Later bedtimes play a greater role in the overweight status of children aged from 3 - 8 years. By getting less sleep at night, young children are tired and not as likely to run around and get exercise during the day. When kids are tired and irritable they often eat more junk food to help regulate their mood.

In addition, there may be a connection between sleep and fat metabolism. There have been some studies conducted that show a lack of sleep may disrupt the secretion of hormones involved in appetite and metabolism. More studies need to be done on this subject.



The National Sleep Foundation recommendations for sleep, including naps:

- Infants and babies, 2 – 12 months: 14 – 15 hours
- Toddlers, 12 – 18 months: 12 – 14 hours
- Toddlers, 18 months – 3 years: 12 – 14 hours
- Children ages 3 - 5: 11 – 13 hours
- Children ages 5 – 12 years: 9 - 11 hours
- Adolescents: 8.5 – 9.5 hours per day

Parents can help by examining their child's sleep schedule. Keeping a consistent night time sleep schedule is crucial. A consistent schedule includes both a bedtime routine and wake up time. A regular routine is comforting for children. It is okay to vary your sleep time on the weekends or special occasions by about an hour or so. However, allowing your child to sleep later is not the answer.

Another recommendation is that children do not have a TV in their bedroom. TV can make it more difficult to fall asleep.

Adequate nighttime sleep is important to children's overall health, performance, and safety. Research supports the importance of parents providing children enough sleep to help reduce the risks of being overweight

Tips for getting young children to bed at night:

- Avoid caffeine (soft drinks, iced tea, and chocolate) close to bedtime.
- Allow young children to be active during the day as it improves their quality of sleep.
- Establish a calm, relaxing, not active, bedtime routine.
- Create a bedroom environment that is quiet and comfortable for sleeping.

Sample steps for a bedtime schedule. They can be changed to meet the needs of your family:

- Bath time is a perfect beginning for bedtime rituals.
- Changing into pajamas.
- If it has been a long time since dinner, a healthy snack can get children through until breakfast.
- Brushing teeth.
- Snuggling up and reading a book or listening to a CD of relaxing music.
- Spending a few minutes in reflection about the day, about what fun you had together, about how much you love him or her.
- Saying good night.

Let's Talk: Parents need to communicate with children that it is important to get sleep so that our bodies have enough rest. Our bodies need rest to have energy to play during the day. Talk about how sleep is important for young bodies to grow and develop properly. Sleep is also important for children's brains to be healthy. Sometimes children develop fears about nighttime. Do not embarrass them about it. Provide encouragement by helping them check out their room before bedtime.



Recipe for Health:

Fruit Creamsicles

- 1 cup plain yogurt
- ½ cup chopped fruit

Whip fruit and yogurt in a blender for about 60 seconds. Pour into small paper cups or Popsicle-style molds, insert Popsicle-style sticks, and freeze. Make 3 fruit creamsicles.

Reference: Watson, S., Sugar-Fee Toddlers, 1991, p. 83.