



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Top Tips for Sleep

Sensory Processing

Issued by the Paediatric Occupational Therapy Department

Children who have challenges with their sensory processing frequently experience issues with sleeping. It is generally recognised that insufficient sleep can have a significant impact on learning and development. Without adequate sleep, children can become easily dysregulated and irritable.

When a child struggles with sensory processing, they can find it challenging to process the information coming in from their individual senses. For example, being unable to tolerate the feeling of nightwear material due to it being too scratchy, too silky, the fit is too tight or too loose or even the material makes them feel too hot.

Labels and bedding/blankets can be difficult to tolerate, the lighting in the bedroom is either too dark or too light or even smells or noise coming from outside the bedroom can cause difficulties with drifting off and staying asleep.

Some helpful strategies are listed below that can aid with achieving a healthy sleep routine (sometimes referred to as sleep hygiene).

Nightwear considerations:

- Encourage your child to choose their nightwear garment.
- Try to avoid synthetic materials and try using a very loose cotton t-shirt – this will also help with temperature regulation.
- If unable to tolerate the movement of clothing on their skin, consider close fitting garments which can offer a slight calming compression element.
- Remove tags and labels where possible from nightwear and bedding if they are causing distress.

Implementing a regular bedtime routine:

- Begin the routine no less than 30 minutes up to one hour before bedtime.
- Engaging in heavy work can have a calming effect. Activities such as wheelbarrow walks, yoga stretches and the Burrito activity (please refer to top tips video for demonstration) can be completed approximately one hour before initiating a bedtime routine.
- Consider avoiding sugary foods and sugary drinks before bedtime.
- It is recognised that blue light from computer screens, TVs, tablets and phones can be a cause of distraction and impact sleep. Consider reducing screen time one hour before bedtime if this is an area of concern for you. If screen time is required before bed, consider opting for a blue light filter. The filter can be downloaded from the app store on iOS or Android devices.
- Consider using a visual timetable for bedtime. Use visual cues to help the child progress through the bedtime routine. For example, encourage them to choose a book, laying out their pyjamas or let them watch you run a bath.
- Consider soothing activities like drawing, puzzles and reading.
- Use gentle movements that are regular and predictable such as rocking or gentle swinging can help to calm.
- Consider a hand massage or back rub.

- Find a sleep routine that works best for you and your child and keep it consistent:
 - Take a warm bath or shower at least one hour before bedtime.
 - Put on pyjamas.
 - Use the bathroom.
 - Brush teeth.
 - Read a book.
 - Go to sleep.
- If your child frequently wakes through the night, implement a consistent routine to assist them back to bed. Make sure to keep lighting and noise levels to a minimum and if they need to go to the bathroom keep the routine simple.

Environmental considerations:

- Dim lighting where possible. Consider using a red nightlight as this imitates natural lighting and promotes the production of sleep hormones.
- Keep the bedroom cool as this helps to slightly lower the body temperature and helps the transition into sleep.
- Tightly tuck the bedsheets in to provide a constant firm pressure which will help to calm your child but please make sure they are able to get out if they choose to.
- Consider offering a body pillow to hug or a large soft toy.
- Consider reducing visual distractions, for example having pastel coloured walls rather than heavily patterned wallpaper or plain, simple curtains. Use blinds and lined curtains to block out unwanted light.

- Try to eliminate excessive background noise where possible such as TVs, radios, and household appliances.
- Encourage exposure to natural daylight around breakfast time to help regulate sleep wake cycles.
- Allow your child to have regular opportunities during their day to incorporate heavy work activities which will help to regulate their sensory systems.

Additional resources

The sleep charity telephone helpline 0330 3530541
[Sleep charity information and resources](#)

Cerebra (Working wonders for children with brain conditions).
[Sensory Processing. A guide for parents and carers.](#)

National Autistic Society
[Sleep a guide for parents of autistic children](#)

Gow, R (2021) Smart Foods for ADHD and Brain Health: How Nutrition Influences Cognitive Function, Behaviour and Mood.
[Amazon.co.uk](#)

Children's Physical Disability Occupational Therapy Service
Child Health Centre, Woodhorn lane, Ashington, Northumberland,
NE63 9JJ Tel: 01670 564050

Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS)

You may be able to claim a refund of some travel costs under this scheme. For more information visit the NHS website:

www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcosts/pages/travelcosts.aspx

Alternative Formats

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Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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