



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Top Tips for Sleep

Sensory Processing

Issued by the Occupational Therapy Sensory Processing Team

People who experience challenges with their sensory processing often also experience difficulties with sleeping. It is widely recognised that insufficient sleep can have a significant impact on learning, development, mood and the ability to complete daily living activities. A lack of adequate sleep may lead to dysregulation and increased irritability.

When a person has sensory processing difficulties, they may find it challenging to interpret and respond to information coming in from their senses. For example, they may be unable to tolerate certain nightwear material due to it being too scratchy, too silky, the fit being too tight or too loose, or even the material makes them feel too hot.

Bedding, labels, and blankets may also feel uncomfortable. In addition, factors such as the lighting where the bedroom is either too dark or too light or even smells from outside of the bedroom can make it difficult to fall asleep.

Some helpful strategies are listed below to support the development of a positive sleep routine also known as sleep hygiene.

Nightwear considerations:

- Encourage the individual 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 30-60 minutes before bedtime.
- Engaging in heavy work can have a calming effect. Examples include:

Activities such as wheelbarrow walks, carrying books and moving cushions.

Pushing and pulling activities, such as pushing a laundry basket, vacuuming or moving a small toy box.

These types of activities can be completed approximately an 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 screens are used, consider 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 them progress through the bedtime routine. For example, choosing a book, laying out pyjamas, or watching a bath being prepared can help a person to progress through the bedtime routine.
- 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 the person frequently wakes through the night, establish a consistent routine to help them return to bed. If they need to use the bathroom, keep the interaction calm and simple, and guide them back to bed without engaging in stimulating activities or conversation. Consistency and a quiet environment can support them in settling back to sleep more easily.

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 bed sheets in to provide constant firm pressure

which will help to calm the person 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.
- Enable the person 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 Sleep charity information and resources 0330 3530541

Sleep Action – Sleep for Adults with Learning Disabilities and Complex Support Needs. <https://sleepaction.org/learn-about/sleep/sleep-for-adults-with-learning-disabilities-and-complex-support-needs/>

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 5

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

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, easy read, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.



British Sign Language users can use InterpretersLive! a service provided by Sign Solutions. This helps Deaf people to access BSL interpreters, and other communication professionals at any time. More information can be found on our website or by scanning the QR code to the left.

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

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

General Enquiries 03 44 811 8111

www.northumbria.nhs.uk

PIN 1022/V1

Review date: June 2029

© This material is the copyright of the Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.