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HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD SLEEP BETTER

From Cleveland Clinic.org

Many children have sleeping issues relating to falling asleep or maintaining sleep through the night. The following tips will help your child fall asleep, stay asleep and establish good sleeping habits.

- **Maintain a consistent sleep schedule** – Your child's bed time and wake up time should be about the same every day of the week, regardless if it is a school day or not. A consistent wake up time sets the stage for the rest of the day and allows adequate sleep pressure to build up by late evening to allow for quicker sleep onset at an appropriate time at night.
- **Exercise daily** – Have your child make exercise part of his or her daily routine. Incorporating exercise as a daily habit at a young age will help establish it as a daily life-long healthy routine.
- **Don't go to bed hungry** – Make sure your child doesn't go to bed hungry. Provide a light snack such as a glass of milk, a piece of fruit or cereal and milk. Avoid offering a heavy meal within 1 to 2 hours of bedtime, as this can interfere with sleep.
- **Avoid caffeinated products** – Your child should avoid products that contain caffeine in the late afternoon/evening. Be aware caffeine-containing products include ice-tea, some clear non-cola pops, energy drinks, and chocolates aside from the more obvious colas and coffee.
- **Plan up to 1 hour of quiet time before bed** – Before bedtime every night, allow your child to set aside up to 1 hour for calm, enjoyable activities, such as listening to quiet music or reading a book. Hygiene and bath routines may be helpful. TV watching, heavy homework, or computer gaming should NOT be part of quiet time. The quiet time activity need not all take place in the child's bedroom but it should culminate there such that the last 10-15 minutes are in the bedroom where the child will sleep.
- **Other bedtime routines** – Quiet time may include going to the bathroom, brushing teeth, etc. Also, it is important for children to be brought to bed/put into bed awake so that they consistently learn to fall asleep themselves in the appropriate location.
- **The bedroom environment** – Your child's bedroom should be quiet,

comfortable (70- 75° F), and dark (a nightlight is acceptable for children afraid of a dark bedroom). To avoid the bad habit of needing a television turned on to fall asleep, do not put a television set in your child's bedroom. It is fine to allow security objects, such as a special blanket or stuffed animal, to be a part of the bedtime routine. Use the bedroom for quiet time and sleeping only; do not use the bedroom for time outs or as a room to send your child for punishment. The bedroom needs to be associated with positive feelings, not negative ones. In your final interaction of the evening, give a hug or a kiss, say goodnight to your child, turn off your child's bedroom light, and leave the room. The final interaction should be predictable, deliberate, brief and yet sufficiently warm and reassuring to your child. Support bed time by keeping the rest of the house quiet and relatively dark.

Is nap taking okay for my child?

The amount of nap time depends on your child's age. Newborns, for example, ‘nap' several hours a day, whereas 2-year-olds may nap one to three hours each day spread over one to two naps. On the other hand, many 4- to 6-year-olds may not require a nap at all. Generally though, too many naps or long naps during the day can interfere with the ability to sleep well at night.

Additional Sleep Information and Suggested Readings

- Mindell, JA and Owens, JA. *A Clinical Guide to Pediatric Sleep: Diagnosis and Management of Sleep Problems.* Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2003.
- www.sleepeducation.com and other educational links on the American Academy of Sleep Medicine website www.aasmnet.org Accessed 7/2/2013.
- The National Sleep Foundation Accessed 7/2/2013.

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