A good night's sleep is important for children, and it may sometimes require parents' helping hands

by Dr. Mark Splaingard/The Ohio State University

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It's easy to tell when a young child needs a nap, but maintaining a consistent sleep schedule for kids in a busy life can be a challenge.

How do you know if your child is getting enough sleep or if an infant is sleeping too much?

A child's sleep habits can impact every member of a household, so it is important to find a consistent routine that best meets everyone's needs.

According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, children need the following amount of sleep in a 24-hour period at each age:

- **Infants (3 to 11 months):** 14 to 15 hours
- **Toddlers:** 12 to 14 hours
- **Preschoolers:** 11 to 13 hours
- **School-age children:** 10 to 11 hours

Too Much Sleep

Of course there are always exceptions and some children sleep many more hours than the average. When determining whether this is normal for your child, consider the following questions:

- Is your child growing normally?
- Is your child developing normal motor and cognitive skills for his age?
- Does your child snore when he sleeps?
- Has your child had recurrent illnesses or other medical problems, such as a head injury, or meningitis?
- Is there a family history of excessive daytime sleepiness, sleep apnea, or narcolepsy?

Sleeping more than the average can be a normal variation if your child is otherwise healthy. However, excessive sleepiness can also be a symptom of:

- Underlying infections
- Metabolic disorders
- Tumors
- Heart or brain problems
- Exposure to toxins

If you are concerned, a pediatrician can review your child's history and conduct a physical exam to look for abnormalities or chronic illnesses that may be causing fatigue and sleepiness.

Not Enough Sleep
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Even if you are providing a consistent routine for your child, he or she may be resistant to falling asleep, continually wake up throughout the night, or wake up very early to start the day.

**Stalling tactics at bedtime**

Commonly referred to as "curtain calls," repeated requests to use the bathroom or requests for a drink, are typical behavior for toddlers and preschool-aged children. This demanding behavior tests whether your limits are consistently enforced. If the rules can be easily altered, a child will take advantage.

Behavioral management techniques can be helpful in eliminating unwanted behaviors. For example, rewarding a child with a sticker in the morning for a good night in bed may be an effective incentive.

**Night waking**

This is a common problem in young children. Most people wake up about every 90 minutes for a few seconds and then settle back to sleep without being aware of awakening.

But young children may cry when they wake up and get used to a parent helping them to fall back asleep. It may seem easier to let your child fall asleep while being held, rocked, or fed, but the habit can be very difficult to break later.

**Early Rising**

An inability to stay asleep early in the morning can also be disruptive to a household. First, consider whether environmental factors such as traffic, trains, or other noises may be waking the child up. It is appropriate to talk to your pediatrician or family doctor if your situation includes any of the following factors:

- Your child snores at night
- Your child complains of leg pains or kicks excessively at night (called periodic limb movements)
- There is a family history of leg pain or restless legs syndrome
- Like adults, some children are "short sleepers" and require less than the average amount of sleep, but this is rare. In addition, children who naturally go to bed early may wake up early and still get a normal amount of sleep for their age. If an early-rising child is active, not particularly cranky or tired, and developing normally, "forcing" him or her to sleep more will likely be frustrating for everyone. The most successful strategy may be to teach the child to play by themselves and to be quiet in bed until others are awake.

**Learn More**

Concerns about behaviors related to sleep should be discussed with your pediatrician or family doctor. Further information about sleep and sleep disorders can be found at the American Academy of Sleep Medicine.

In addition, the following books describe the problems and treatments of children with difficulty staying asleep:

- "Solving Your Child's Sleep Problems," by Dr. Richard Ferber.
- "Sleeping Through the Night," by Jodi Mindell.

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