

SLEEP IN CHILDREN AND TEENS

School aged children (ages 6-12) need 10-12 hours of sleep every night.
Teenagers (ages 13-18) need 9-11 hours of sleep!

Difficulties falling asleep and staying asleep are very common and are seen in 15-25% of children and teenagers. Getting adequate sleep is very important for memory, concentration, energy, motivation, and mood. The majority of sleep problems can be solved with improved “sleep hygiene”.

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Some simple tips:

- Avoid all caffeine (tea, cola, coffee, energy drinks, etc)
- Avoid taking naps during the day
- Get some exercise every day, but try not to plan this in the late evening
- For the 1-2 hours before bed, children and teens should be doing relaxing activities to wind down and get your mind ready for sleep
- For the 1-2 hours before bed *all* screen use should be eliminated (TV, computers, iPads, iPods, etc!) as the light in these screens lower the body’s sleep hormones and worsens difficulty falling asleep
- Ensure the bedroom is cool, dark, and quiet
- The bed should be used only for sleeping- not for homework, watching TV, etc
- Try to have a consistent bedtime and a consistent routine leading up to bedtime
- On the weekend, try to wake up within a couple hours of the usual weekday wakeup time so as not to disturb any established sleep schedule

If children and teens work on “sleep hygiene” and are still finding it difficult to fall asleep, the use of melatonin should be considered. Melatonin is considered a “natural health product” by Health Canada and is a hormone made by our bodies to regulate the sleep/wake cycle. It can be purchased over the counter. Start with a dose of 3-5 mg taken about 1 hour before bedtime.