

Caregiver Guide To Help Neurodiverse Youth Sleep Better

It is common for youth with neurodevelopmental disorders to have sleep difficulties.

- Up to 86% of youth with neurodevelopmental disorders have problems with sleep.
- This can include problems falling asleep, staying asleep, and waking for the day very early in the morning.
- This may be related to lower levels of the hormone melatonin in the brain – melatonin is cued to release by darkness and helps people fall asleep, stay asleep, and regulate their sleep-wake cycle.
- Overall sleep is a complex function of the brain!

Not getting enough sleep is linked with health and behaviour problems.

- Not sleeping well can affect physical health including heart health, immune system, metabolism.
- Not enough sleep can have a negative impact on learning, memory, attention, ability to adapt to change, and creativity.
- Sleep difficulties can worsen behaviour including increased aggression, irritability, depression, impulsivity, hyperactivity, and anxiety.
- Caregiver stress can be impacted.

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE SLEEP FOR YOUTH WITH NDDs?

There are many environmental and behavioural strategies that can help with getting a better nights rest.

Regular Daytime Routines

What we do in the day sets us up for sleep at night.

Regular Sleep and Wake Times

No more than 1 hour difference on weekdays and weekends.

Consistent Bedtime Routine

Light carbohydrate bedtime snack, consider visual sleep schedule for sleep routine including brushing teeth, story time, etc., calming activities before bed such as a bath, reading or listening to a podcast, storytelling with familiar stories, or soothing quiet music.

Avoid Screen Use 1 Hour Before Bed

Phones, computers, tablets, and TV should all be avoided before bed; the light can inhibit melatonin release and make falling asleep difficult.



Physical Activity

Doing your best to get physical activity every day but avoiding vigorous activity in the evenings.

Avoid Caffeine in the Late Afternoon and Evening

This includes coffee, caffeinated pop/soda, energy drinks, and some teas (green, black).

A Quiet, Dark, Comfy Sleeping Environment

- Use a comfortable mattress, temperature regulating sheets, and a weighted blanket.
- Create a dark room (even low levels of light can inhibit melatonin release), be mindful that dim night lights can sometimes be a focal point.
- Use a white noise machine.
- Room colours should be calm with minimal colourful high contrast items.
- Create a consistent environment — don't turn off night lights or white noise overnight.

Melatonin

Some youth benefit from extra melatonin because their levels in the brain are low. See a breakdown about melatonin on the other side of this sheet.



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Sometimes levels of melatonin in the brain are low and it can make it hard to get a good sleep.

Melatonin is a safe and effective medication to help with sleep. You can buy melatonin over the counter at the pharmacy, a prescription is not needed in Canada.

MELATONIN COMES IN 3 DIFFERENT FORMS

1. SHORT ACTING	2. LONG ACTING	3. SHORT + LONG COMBO
Works quickly, helps fall asleep, take at the same time every night to help regulate the sleep-wake cycle; comes as a quick-dissolve tab or gummy.	Long acting: slowly releases over the night, helps kids stay asleep; has to be swallowed whole to get the slow release to work.	Combination pill with short and long acting: helps falling asleep, staying asleep, and regulating the sleep wake cycle.

IMPORTANT INFO TO KNOW ABOUT MELATONIN

A few points to know before getting started with melatonin.

- It is best to take 2.5-5 mg of melatonin – max of 10 mg from all forms of melatonin.
- Take the melatonin at the same time every night (usually 30-60 minutes before bedtime) for at least four weeks. If it doesn't help after that, try going down on the dose as it might be that it is lasting into the daytime and causing problems for the sleep-wake cycle.
- The main side effects are tiredness (which we are ok with) and a tummy-ache or headache as the person gets used to the medication.
- Benadryl or other medications that make children drowsy are generally not recommended to help with sleep because they do not promote restful, high quality sleep and can lead to daytime drowsiness the next day.
- See our website for a full review of melatonin.

