



Back to School Sleep Tips

During summer months, we have a way of letting bedtimes sneak later and later. It has much to do with the fact that the daylight hours are longer, thus interfering with the release of Melatonin (our 'sleepy hormone'). That, and the fact that we feel the need to get out there and enjoy every bit of the warm weather and sunshine we possibly can. We all find ourselves up later than usual, and this can spell trouble when September rolls around.

As the summer comes to an end you look back fondly at all the trips to the beach, the back yard barbecues, and the after dinner walks to the ice cream store but you also realize that with summer's end comes the need to get your children back on some sort of a sleep schedule.

So what should you do?

- First, don't wait until the night before school starts to try to lay down the new/old law and have everybody in bed by 8:00. The excitement of a new school year, along with a couple of months of late bedtimes will make this a difficult place to start.
- At least two weeks before school starts, you should slowly start moving bedtime back to an appropriate time. If your child has been going to bed somewhere around 8:30-9:00pm for the past couple months, start by bringing bedtime earlier by 15 minutes every 4 nights. This way, by the time school begins, your child's body has adjusted to going to bed at an earlier time.
- I suggest that pre-school and school aged children through to adolescents, should be going to bed between 7:00 and 8:00 pm. If you constantly need to wake your child in the morning, then he/she is going to bed too late. Putting your child to bed at the same time every night will teach their bodies to sleep the needed amount of night time hours, so they can wake feeling naturally refreshed. No need for alarm clocks if you child is going to bed early enough!
- Get the kids involved! This can include toddlers, and all the way up to teens. For the little ones make a chart of the bedtime routine and go over it with them before bedtime. Some good examples of bedtime routine activities include: a bath, getting pyjamas on, a glass of warm milk or a light snack (nothing sugary or caffeinated), stories, happy thoughts about their day and so on. The purpose of the routine is to act as a system of cues for your child's body and brain; it lets them know that the time for sleep is near. It should be in the same order every night and move in a step-by-step fashion. For young children, offering a sticker or a happy face beside each step of the routine (on the chart) can keep it moving in a efficient and positive way.



- Setting a timer can be a fun, and effective way to keep the bedtime routine on track. You can make it a goal to get everyone ready and in bed by the time the timer goes off. That way it's not really YOUR fault that they have to get ready for bed, it's the timer's decision! If they co-operate you can include a small reward at the end, such as a sticker, or a collection of stickers that add up to a bigger reward. A good length for a bedtime routine is about half an hour to 45 minutes.
- As a child reaches puberty the increase and changes in hormones levels, usually turns your once early-to-bed-child into a night owl. It's very natural and normal for teens to feel the need to stay up late and sleep longer into the morning. Unfortunately, this is not the way the adult world works, so they do need to conform and get up early in the morning with the rest of the family.
- You can help your teen by encouraging her to write out a bedtime routine that can help her make the transition into night time easier. For teens, a bath or shower can be a good way to unwind and a glass of warm milk or camomile tea might help with the release of Melatonin. Additionally, some quiet time in their room listening to music or reading can be a good way to relax, followed by sleep. Again, 30 minutes is an appropriate length for a bedtime routine and trying to get to bed at the same time every night will make it easier and more of a habit to wake up at the same time in the morning.
- Watching TV or playing video games right before bed has been linked to an increase in the amount of time it takes children to fall asleep, so those activities should be stopped at least an hour before bedtime.

One last tip: make sure your child's room is dark enough at bedtime. This will help with the transition both at night and in the morning. The early rising sun can provoke all of us to wake too early so purchase some black out blinds or hang a blanket over windows to help keep out the sun.

If you would like some printable bedtime routine charts or other "kid friendly" facts about sleep, check out www.sleepforkids.org

Sleep Well!

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