

Start off right: Ensure a better night's sleep this year

A state of sleep is necessary to give the body and mind time to recharge and prepare for the next day. Though such benefits are widely recognized, a significant percentage of individuals across the globe are failing to get sufficient rest, a dangerous reality that could be putting people at risk for various diseases and conditions.

Lack of sleep is such a prominent problem that the research team behind a 2024 study published in the journal *The Lancet: Diabetes & Endocrinology* dubbed insufficient

sleep as a "neglected public health issue." That study surveyed 2,000 adults in the United Kingdom and found that 90 percent of respondents reported current sleep problems, with two-thirds of those individuals indicating they had experienced their issues for more than six years. And it's not just adults suffering from sleep issues, as a 2023 peer-reviewed editorial written for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the modern 24-hour lifestyle and pervasive utilization of electron-

ics and social media is normalizing insufficient sleep among children and adolescents. Sleeping problems are not to be taken lightly, as the National Institutes of Health notes sleep deficiency has been linked to heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, obesity, and depression. Children who are not getting enough sleep may experience difficulty paying attention, which could adversely affect their academic performance, and might be prone to misbehavior. Of course, many of

these side effects can be avoided by getting sufficient sleep. With that in mind, adults, parents, children, and adolescents can consider these strategies to get a better night's sleep, courtesy of the Sleep Foundation.

- Replace an old mattress. Old mattresses can be uncomfortable and thus make it harder to fall asleep.
- Block out light. Light exposure adversely affects circadian rhythm, so keep external light out of your bedroom and dim lights as bedtime approaches. Avoiding bright light

as you transition to bedtime can contribute to the production of the hormone melatonin, which facilitates sleep.

- Set an appropriate temperature. The Sleep Foundation advises setting a bedroom temperature thermostat to between 65 and 68 degrees Fahrenheit to prevent feelings of being too hot or too cold when going to bed.
- Wake up at the same time each day. A routine that includes the same wake-up time each day can acclimate the body to a healthy sleep routine.
- Begin to relax 30

minutes before bed. A pre-bedtime routine focused on relaxation can facilitate sleep.

- Avoid devices an hour before bed. The light emitted by tablets, smartphones and laptops can suppress melatonin production, making it hard to fall asleep. Make the hour before bedtime each night a device-free time.
- Exercise each day, but avoid intense activity close to bedtime. Daily exercise has been found to promote sleep, but intense exercise right before bed can make it hard for the body to settle down.

Kids' bedtime guidelines by age

Sleep is pivotal for a child's development. The American Academy of Pediatrics says insufficient sleep is a growing health problem, with some estimates indicating 25 to 50 percent of children and 40 percent of adults have sleep problems. This can lead to issues with attention, behavior, learning, and even physical health, including an increased risk for obesity and depression.

The right routine can make a world of difference in relation to children and sleep. Despite the importance of sleep, bedtime is one of the most challenging times of day in many households. Learning the amount of sleep a child needs and sticking to a routine, particularly as kids grow, can help foster healthy sleep hab-

its that last a lifetime.

Infants

Infancy is a time of rapid development when children go through many sleep stages. While newborns tend to sleep in short, irregular bursts that don't always follow the day/night schedule, sleep patterns begin to consolidate by the time kids are four months old. A consistent bedtime routine is essential, which can include a simple sequence of three to four calming activities to signal to baby that it's time to wind down. Experts call this the "3Bs": bath, book, bed. Additional calming activities like a massage or final feeding also can help infants get the 12 to 16 hours of sleep they need each day, including naps.

The AAP recommends placing a baby in the crib while drowsy

to help the child learn to fall asleep on their own.

Toddlers

Parents of toddlers know they are bustling with energy as they learn to walk, talk and explore. Recommended sleep for ages one to two is 11 to 14 hours per day, including naps.

Consistency is paramount for this age group, which means keeping bedtimes the same from day to day. Make sure the routine is predictable to help regulate toddlers' internal clocks. Chances are toddlers will begin to protest bedtime at some point, at which point parents must be gentle but firm about keeping kids in bed.

Preschool-aged

By ages three to five, some children begin to drop the afternoon nap and get all of their 10 to

13 hours of sleep overnight. They also are becoming more imaginative, which means that nightmares might crop up more regularly within this age group. A calm, screen-free bedtime routine can help clear the mind so youngsters can get the rest they need.

School-aged

This is a time when prioritizing sleep is really put to the test. Friends, school and extracurricular activities begin to place greater demands on scheduling, and can interfere with children getting enough sleep. The general recommendation is 9 to 12 hours of sleep for children ages six to 12.

To facilitate getting rest, parents can make the bedroom a sanctuary that is free from tablets, phones or other devices that may distract children from sleeping.



kids' internal clocks, and many teens do not get the rest they need. Parents can encourage their children to turn off their phones and maintain consistent schedules so they can get enough rest. Also, they should be dissuaded from waking up or going to sleep at different times on weekends, or making up sleep, as this can disrupt sleep patterns and cause "social jetlag."

Sleep is crucial for good health and something parents should prioritize and facilitate through all stages of development.

2026
HAPPY NEW YEAR

It's a great honor to serve as your state representative for Green, LaRue and Hart Counties. I am looking forward to a productive 2026 legislative session, which started January 6, and will continue through April 15.



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