

Sleep: The critical, yet often overlooked link to healthy development

Sleep experts present a strong case—sleep is an integral part of healthy child development. Research finds that during sleep, a child's body develops as it:

- Builds memory and concentration
- Builds the immune system and nervous system
- Repairs damage to the body's cells, and helps in healing
- Regulates mood
- Regulates hormone production, including human growth hormone (HGH) that children need to grow
- Organizes memories and solidifies learning
- Stimulates the brain for areas used in learning and development

Sleep problems

The consequences of too little sleep can add up quickly. And sleep problems are often overlooked by adults as they consider reasons for children's behavior difficulties, poor health, and chronic school absences. Sleep experts recommend that parents and caregivers look at sleep development as they assess overall health and development of a child. A child (or adult) who gets too little sleep may:

- Be less able to self-regulate, and that contributes to impulsive or aggressive behavior.
- Be at risk for obesity and diabetes.
- Have decreased memory and concentration skills, that contribute to risky situations and invite accidents.
- Be irritable and have poor mood.
- Have attachment difficulties and depression.
- Develop patterns and behaviors that become habits that are hard to reverse.
- Have poor overall health.

Sleepy children

Many children do not get enough sleep due to challenges within the family, such as long work schedules and extracurricular activities.

Another factor that limits

sleep time is that many children have poor sleep habits. Poor sleep habits include when a child has trouble falling asleep or resists sleep, makes poor dietary choices, has a computer or television in his bedroom, or often wakes during the night.



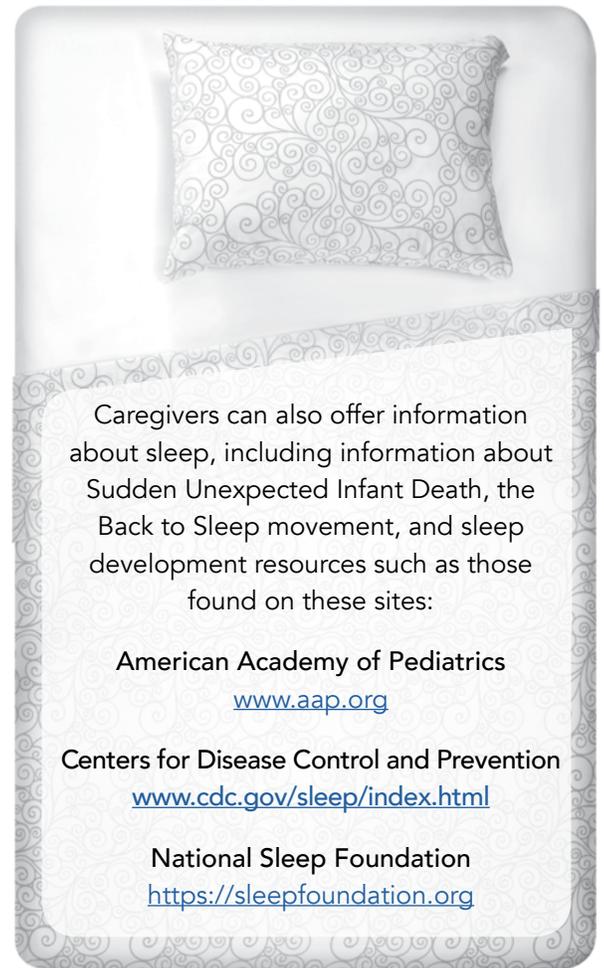
Sleepy caregivers

Lack of sleep can tremendously impact the quality of care and education offered to children and families. Many adults believe they can function just as well as usual on less sleep, but experts agree that lack of sleep leads to poor decision-making and irritability, and therefore an adverse effect on the quality of care. Sleep experts suggest that any adult who has trouble sleeping should consult her health care practitioner. A general sleep rule is if the person feels refreshed upon waking, she is getting enough sleep.

Talk sleep with families

Healthy sleep and sleep patterns aid in the healthy overall development of children. Families can help the caregiver get to know their child's sleep patterns by furnishing information such as:

- How many hours of sleep the child normally gets.
- The child's typical bedtime routine.
- The child's typical waking routine, including time and mood.
- Any health or sleep problems.
- Whether the child naps, when, and for how long.
- The child's sleep pattern on weekends.



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