Sleep your way to health

Toddlers and preschoolers should spend 50% of their time sleeping. Sleep promotes growth in kids and helps maintain a healthy weight, beat germs, and with attention and learning. For example, 3 year olds who slept less than 10.5 hours per night were 1.5 times more likely to be overweight or obese when they were 7 years old, compared to 3 year olds who slept longer. In another study, researchers had preschoolers skip their afternoon nap and delay bedtime by 2 hours on one day. On the next day, the sleep-deprived preschoolers consumed 20% more calories than on days following regular sleep. Researchers are now starting to study how sleep affects physical activity, and vice versa.

Physical activity helps kids sleep

Many parents report that their children have trouble falling asleep, but research shows physical activity can help. Among 7 year olds, kids who were more active during the day fell asleep faster. The kids who took a long time to fall asleep ended up with shorter sleeps. The idea behind these results is that active kids are tired once it's time for bed and this helps them fall asleep faster. Also, kids who get more sleep have more energy to be active during the day. We still need research on physical activity and sleep in toddlers and preschoolers.

400 preschoolers participated in our Health Outcomes and Physical activity in Preschoolers (HOPP) Study. We asked parents how many hours per day their child slept (including night time sleeping and naps). On average, parents reported their preschoolers slept almost 11 hours per day, including night time sleeping and naps.
How much sleep does my child need?

Every child is different; some will need more sleep and some will need less. This chart is a general guide of how much your child should sleep over a 24-hour period, based on the Canadian Pediatric Society’s recommendations. Meeting these sleep targets will help your child grow, prevent them from becoming overweight, and fight off cold and flu germs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Recommended Sleep (Hours)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toddlers (2-3 yrs)</td>
<td>10-13 hours *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschoolers (3-5 yrs)</td>
<td>10-12 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-age (6-10 yrs)</td>
<td>10-12 hours</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Including napping

Strategies for parents:
• Avoid giving kids drinks with caffeine, like pop
• Try not to let your child nap too late in the day
• Avoid screen time before bed and keep screens out of bedroom
• Keep a regular sleep routine -- same bedtime and wake-up time every day
• Set limits for the bedtime routine, such as how many books you'll read
• Don't ignore bedtime fears -- special blankets or stuffed animals can be helpful
• Keep the bedroom quiet and the lights off or dimmed for sleeping

The Child Health & Exercise Medicine Program at McMaster University is working to advance child health through excellence in research.
To learn about our current studies, visit us online at fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp

References

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