



How to Help a Child with ADHD Sleep Better

Sleep problems affect half of all children who have ADHD. The main problem is difficulty with falling asleep. After a child goes to bed, it may take them 1 to 2 hours to get to sleep. Although all children may struggle with sleep at times, having ADHD can:

- Make kids extra-sensitive to stimulation, including noise and other distractions in their bedroom.
- Cause sleeplessness if they're taking medication.

Many children with ADHD are night owls. They may:

- Stay up late and have trouble getting up for school.
- Be tired during the day, especially for the first few hours after waking up.

Avoid blaming your child. Most children want to fall asleep easily but can't. You can help your child—and yourself—deal with this challenge.

How you can help

Talk with your doctor about your child's sleep problem. If the cause is ADHD itself:

- Keep a bedtime diary for 2 weeks.
- Write down how long it takes your child to fall asleep each night.

This helps you and your doctor make a sleep plan.

Sleep habits

These tips can help your child feel more calm and ready to sleep.

- Avoid afternoon naps, if possible. Napping can cause children to be less tired at night.
- Encourage physical activity in the afternoon, not too close to bedtime. Your child will probably be tired by nighttime.
- Switch off screens and digital devices 60 minutes before bedtime. Keep devices out of the bedroom.
- Have your child take a warm bath or long shower an hour before bed.
- Avoid caffeine completely for young children. Teens shouldn't have caffeine after noon.
- Keep their bedroom quiet.

► Bedtime routines

Allow only quiet activities in the hour before bedtime. Reading or listening to music can be relaxing. Some kids find rock or rap music calming, while others need soothing tunes. Try relaxation or guided imagery audio recordings.

Other ideas include:

- Run a fan or use other “white noise” in the bedroom to block distracting noises.
- Give your child a healthy, nonsugary snack.
- Spend quiet time together cuddling, talking, or reading.
- Keep the room comfortably cool.

► Relaxation methods

Muscle relaxation. Ask your child to tense a group of muscles, such as their neck and shoulders. Have them:

- Hold it for 15 to 30 seconds, then relax.
- Breathe slowly and notice how their body feels.

Continue having your child tighten and relax different sets of muscles, for several minutes. They may become more relaxed and ready to sleep.

Aromatherapy. Try essential oils with calming scents, such as chamomile, lavender, or lemon balm, to help with relaxation. These can be used in an aromatherapy diffuser.

Guided imagery. Audio books or sleep stories on the Calm app may also help your child relax.

If your child still has problems after trying these relaxation methods for several weeks, talk with your doctor about medications and supplements.

► Medication and supplements

Melatonin is a natural hormone. Studies show it helps children with ADHD fall asleep at night. The recommended dose starts at ½ to 1 mg, depending on the child’s age and weight. Although melatonin appears to be safe, it hasn’t been studied as much as other sleep supplements.

Diphenhydramine (Benadryl) is an antihistamine that can cause drowsiness. A dose of 12.5 to 50 mg can be given 1 hour before bedtime. Check with your doctor to make sure Benadryl is okay for your child and to discuss possible side effects. Benadryl can increase hyperactivity in some children.

We may recommend another medication to help your child sleep.

► Sleep apnea

Children with ADHD may also have sleep apnea, a condition that disrupts their sleep. Talk with your doctor about screening for sleep apnea if your child often snores or is sleepy during the day, even after getting enough sleep at night.

Additional resources

For more health information, tools, and other resources:

- Search kp.org/mydoctor
- Watch our video “Understanding ADHD Medications” at kpdoc.org/adhdmeds
- Visit our ADHD health guide at kpdoc.org/ADHD
- Download the Calm app at kpdoc.org/calmapp
- Contact your local Health Education Department