

Trouble Sleeping? Tips to Help Your Child Get to Sleep Naturally

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Ask any parent and they can tell you that “sleeping like a baby” is a contradiction in terms. Most parents have become far too familiar with children’s sleep issues, ranging from restless sleep to night terrors. According to the National Sleep Foundation, more than 65 percent of all children experience at least one sleep problem a week, and more than 75 percent of parents would like to change something about their child’s sleep habits.

The recommended amount of sleep within a 24-hour period is 14 – 15 hours for infants; 12 – 14 hours for toddlers; 11 – 13 hours for pre-schoolers and 10 – 11 hours for school-aged kids. Most American children are not obtaining the recommended amount of sleep, which, in turn, is affecting their daytime behavior, including school performance.

In order to help your child get a better night’s sleep, consider cutting out television before bed, especially programs that have any violence or scary images. These images may remain in a child’s thoughts and lead to night terrors. Television, computers and other types of entertainment can cause over-stimulation and contribute to an inability to relax and sleep. Food and drinks containing sugar and caffeine are best avoided near bedtime since they can cause hyperactivity in children.

Having a regular relaxing bedtime ritual can help children mentally and physically prepare for sleep. For example, a warm bath followed by some bedtime stories or soothing music can help a child relax and prepare for sleep. Allowing plenty of time for the bedtime ritual helps avoid feeling rushed and anxious. Try to make the process as comfortable and soothing as possible. A night-light may help calm your child’s fear of the dark. Using a timed night light that gradually fades and then turns off can help ease your child to sleep.

If your child is still tossing and turning or waking in the middle of the night, certain natural therapies can help ease your child into relaxation and sleep.

- Create an herbal sleep sachet. Place a half-cup each of loose hops, chamomile flowers, lavender flowers, lemon balm and rosebuds into a small cloth bag or sachet, and place inside your child’s pillowcase at bedtime.
- Consider a homeopathic medicine such as Calms Forte 4 Kids by Hyland’s. This or a well-selected, individual homeopathic remedy can help with restlessness, irritability, night terrors

and anxiety.

- A cup of unsweetened chamomile tea can be much more effective than cow's milk to help sooth your child before bed.
- Touch can be a valuable tool. You don't have to be a masseuse to provide a gentle massage that will ease sore muscles and encourage relaxation. Try using almond oil with a drop of lavender or orange oil.
- A warm bath or footbath with a few drops of chamomile or lavender oil has sedative and calming effects (do not use essential oils with children under 3 months old). Or you can use the same herbs from the sleep sachet to create a bath tea for a relaxing tub soak.
- Herbal glycerites containing hops, passionflower, lemon balm, wild oats, German chamomile or valerian can help with gentle sedation and aid in peaceful sleep.

Getting a good night's sleep is critical for both children and parents. But in today's fast-paced world, getting to sleep – and staying asleep – can sometimes be challenging. Instead of lying awake in frustration, a growing number of families are finding that integrating a variety of natural remedies and some simple changes in their bedtime routine can set the stage for a night full of uninterrupted dreams.

Dr. Trevor Holly Cates received a Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine degree from the National College of Naturopathic Medicine. Co-founder of the Santa Barbara Center for Natural Medicine, Dr. Cates provides individualized naturopathic care with a focus on women and children's healthcare. As a naturopathic doctor, her goal is to enhance the body's innate ability to heal itself.