

Sleep

Information for parents of children
with ADHD



©iStock/tylim

Sleep and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Children with ADHD can experience difficulties falling asleep, staying asleep and getting up the next morning. The quality of their sleep can also be poor; their sleep is often described as restless with an inability to 'shut off'. Your child is an individual and there is no specific one size fits all solution to this difficult issue that can have an impact on the whole family. For children with a diagnosis of ADHD a lack of sleep can lead to an increase in symptoms of ADHD and impact on their ability to think and reason.



The impact of lack of sleep on your child

- More prone to illness as lack of sleep lowers the immune system
- Quickly changing emotions – irritability, anger, frustration, sadness
- Increased stress and anxiety
- Difficulty coping with what is expected of them
- Difficulty concentrating and thinking
- Increase in symptoms of ADHD

What is melatonin

Melatonin is a natural hormone that is produced in the brain. Also known as our 'sleep hormone' it lets us know that it's time to go to sleep.

Melatonin is actively produced at night time when darkness occurs. The darker it is, the more melatonin is produced. In darkness melatonin levels rise sharply and act to lower body temperature, make us feel less alert and cause a sleepy feeling. Melatonin levels stay elevated throughout the night, approximately 12 hours. During daylight hours melatonin is barely detectable in the brain.



Sleep difficulties

Inability to settle

- Teach your child to 'self-settle' by putting them to bed when they are still awake
- Say goodnight and leave the room
- Do not give eye contact after saying goodnight
- Repeat same phrase for example "it's night, go to sleep" in response to requests to stay or any attempt to engage you in conversation
- Gradually withdraw from the room if you usually stay until they are asleep. Slowly move closer to the door over a number of nights until you are outside the door
- Establish a good bedtime routine with the same bedtime and waking time, stick to it every day including weekends
- Avoid use of electrical equipment such as phone, tablet, computer, TV or games player at least an hour before bed. The light they produce will stop production of melatonin in the brain
- Make the room as dark as possible to help melatonin production
- Encourage supper with 'sleepy foods' (see sleep hygiene sheet)
- Avoid drinks with caffeine in as these can impact on sleep
- Do not allow your child to sleep in the day.

Waking in the night

- Decide a time that is acceptable to you to start the day, for example 6am, if your child wakes before this treat it as night waking
- Repeat phrase such as "its night, go to sleep" in response to attempts to make conversation. Keep talk to a minimum
- Return them to bed if they get up
- Do not give eye contact and keep lights dim.

Sleep difficulties

Issues with bedroom environment

- Ensure that the bedroom is not over stimulating with bright colours and lots of toys. Your child may get up in the night to play with toys
- Is there anything on the walls or in the room that might look frightening in the dark?
- Ensure that the bed is comfortable and the room is at the right temperature
- Is bedding too warm, too cold, a texture your child dislikes?
- Is the room dark enough? This will impact on melatonin levels
- Are there any noises that may disturb your child? Some children sleep better with familiar white noise such as the sound of a fan
- Avoid letting your child fall to sleep watching TV, phone or tablet as this will also impact on melatonin levels and keep them awake.

Impact of health and wellbeing on sleep

- Is there something impacting on your child's health such as illness or pain?
- Is your child stressed or anxious about something?
- Is the medication that your child is taking impacting on their sleep?
- Seek medical advice if you feel that there is a specific reason for your child's sleep difficulties.

Establishing a good bedtime routine

Who will carry out the routine? It is OK for different people to carry out the routine such as parents or grandparents, as long as everyone is consistent.

Explain to your child what you want to happen and how it will be achieved

Develop a visual timetable of the bedtime routine with your child and place it somewhere visible such as the fridge door.

Have some quiet time with your child the hour before they go to bed, doing things they enjoy such as reading or music. Activities involving hand/ eye coordination such as jigsaws, Rubik's cube, colouring are known to promote sleep.

Your child should not return downstairs once they have gone to bed.

Establish a rewards system with your child that is meaningful to them, such as stickers or charts. Decide with them how they will earn rewards and do not remove a reward once it has been awarded. Make the routine achievable for your child and give rewards immediately.

Exercise during the day will promote sleep at night, this should not only make your child feel tired and ready to fall asleep, but also improve the quality of sleep.

Your child may not want their bed time routine to change and they may test your resolve, although difficult it is important that you remain consistent.

Bedtime routine



©iStock/Tom Merton



Have a bath



Go to the toilet



Put PJs on



Read a book



Brush teeth



Sleep time



Doncaster Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
Rotherham Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust,
Honeysuckle Lodge, Woodfield Park,
Doncaster, DNS 8QN

Tel: (01302) 566728

If you would like this in large print, braille or on audiotape or would like this document in an alternative language, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 0800 015 4334.

Amharic

ይህንን ጽሑፍ በግልጽ እንዲታይዎ በትላቱ፣ በብራይል ተጽፎ ወይም በቲፕ ተተድቶ ወይም በሌላ ቋንቋ ተጽፎ ለሞቸ የሚፈልጉ ከሆነ የሰበሰቡትን ምክርና ግንኙነት ለገልግሎትን በዚህ ቁጥር 0800 015 4334 ደውሎ ያነጋግሩ።

Arabic

إذا أردت الحصول على هذه الوثيقة بالخط الكبير أو بلغة برايل أو على هيئة شريط صوتي أو مترجمة إلى لغة بنظرة فبرجى الاتصال بخدمة التنسيق ونصيحة المريض Patient Advice and Liaison Service على رقم الهاتف 0800 015 4334 .

Bengali

আপনি যদি এটা বড় অক্ষরের ছাপায়, ব্রেইল-এ, বা কানে শোনার টেইপ-এ পেতে চান অথবা আপনি যদি এই কাগজটা অন্য কোন ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে 0800 015 4334 নম্বরে পেশেন্ট এ্যাড্‌ভাইস এন্ড লিয়েজঁ সার্ভিসের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

Cantonese (traditional Chinese)

如果你希望本文件是采用大字印刷、盲文或录音磁带等格式，或者希望本文件是使用其它的语言，请联络病惠建议与联络服务 (Patient Advice and Liaison Service)，电话号码：0800 015 4334。

Czech

Pokud byste chtěli dokument psaný většími písmeny, brailovým písmem nebo na zvukové kazetě nebo v jiném jazyku, prosím, kontaktujte poradenskou službu pacientům na tel. 0800 015 4334.

Farsi

در صورت تمایل به داشتن این سند به نسخه ای با چاپ درشت تر، به خط بریل یا نسخه صوتی، و یا به زبانی دیگر، لطفاً با دفتر خدمات مشاوره و هماهنگی بیماران به شماره تلفن ۰۸۰۰۰۱۵۴۳۳۴ تماس حاصل نمایید.

French

Si vous désirez ce document en gros caractères, en braille, enregistré sur cassette audio ou dans une autre langue, veuillez contacter le service de conseils et liaison des patients [Patients Advice and Liaison Service] au 0800 015 4334.

Kurdish Sorani

ئەگەر تۆم زانیاریانە بە چۆنی گۆره، برائیل یان لەسەر شریتی دەنگی دەخوازیت باخود ئەم بەلگنامە بە دیکە دەخوازیت، تکلە پامۆندی بکە بە خزمەتگۆزاری زینماپی و هاوناھەنگی نەمخۆشەو بە ژمارە 0800 015 4334.

Polish

Jeżeli dokument wymagany jest w wersji drukowanej dużą czcionką lub alfabetem Braille'a, na kasecie audio lub w innym języku, prosimy o kontakt z zespołem ds. kontaktów z pacjentami (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) pod numerem telefonu 0800 015 4334.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਵੱਡੀ ਛਪਾਈ, ਬ੍ਰੇਲ ਨਾ ਸੁਣਨ ਵਾਲੀ ਟੇਪ ਤੇ ਚੱਟੇ ਟੇ ਨਾ ਇਸ ਸਮਝਾਵੇਨ ਨੂੰ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਚੱਟੇ ਟੇ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਮਰੀਜ਼ ਸੇਵਾ ਅਤੇ ਕਾਲ-ਸੇਵਾ ਸੇਵਾ (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) ਨਾਲ 0800 015 4334 ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

Somali

Haddii aad jeclaan lahayd in aad kan ku hesho far waaweyn, farta braille ee dadka indhaha la' ama cajalad dhegeysi ah ama haddii aad jeclaan lahayd in aad dukumeentigan ku hesho luqad kale, fadlan Adeegga Talobixinta iyo Xiriirinta ee Bukaanleyda (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) kala soo xiriir lambarka 0800 015 4334.

Turkish

Bu belgeyi büyük yazı, braille (kör alfabesi) veya ses kaydı olarak veya başka bir dilde almak istiyorsanız, lütfen 0800 015 4334 no.lu telefondan Hasta Danışmanlık ve İrtibat Hizmetleri ile bağlantıya geçiniz.

Urdu

اگر آپ یہ بڑی چھاپی، بریل میں یا صوتی ٹیپ پر حاصل کرنا چاہیں یا یہ دستاویز کسی قابل زبان میں چاہیں تو براے کرم پیشاپیش ایڈوائس اینڈ لیزن سروس سے رابطہ کریں۔ 0800 015 4334

Vietnamese

Nếu muốn có tài liệu này dưới dạng in chữ cỡ lớn hơn, chữ nổi braille hay bằng ghi âm, hoặc bằng một ngôn ngữ khác, xin quý vị liên hệ bộ phận Dịch vụ Tư vấn và Liên lạc với Bệnh nhân theo số 0800 015 4334.

This information is correct at the time of publishing
Last Reviewed: January 2021