





What is Sleep Hygiene?

Sleep Hygiene is the term used to describe healthy habits around sleep. A considerable amount of research has gone into this subject for children and adults alike to help develop guidelines and tips towards sleeping well on a regular basis. There is a great deal of evidence that shows good sleep hygiene can provide long term solutions around sleep issues.

Sleep Hygiene tips:

Maintain a consistent day time routine. This means having regular sleep times and wake up times.

Have a bath. Giving your child a bath an hour before bedtime causes their body temperature to rise. When it drops again, they tend to feel sleepy.

Avoid spending non-sleeping time in bed. This tip is in relation to positive sleep associations. Allowing the bedroom space to be used exclusively for sleep (and getting changed) makes it less likely for children to wake through the night wanting to play in their room because they are not allowed to do so during the day.

Have a bedtime routine. Maintaining a regular sequence of events leading up to bedtime means the child knows what's coming. It can be something as simple as bath, milk, teeth, books and then bed. You can develop your own, just as long as you're consistent.

Be mindful of protecting the natural production of Melatonin. Melatonin is a hormone that is made by the Pineal Gland which is responsible for maintaining the sleep-wake cycle. Melatonin alone does not keep you asleep but it does help you fall asleep. You learn to stay asleep when being on a consistent routine which sets your body's circadian rhythm. Melatonin can only be produced in darkness so for children (and adults too); it is really important that the hour leading up to bedtime is a little darker. That means turning off some lights if able, drawing some blinds, and the non negotiable is absolutely no screen time in any sense or form within that hour. The white light omitted from screens prohibits Melatonin from being produced.

Allow your child to self settle to sleep. What this means is allowing your child to complete the act of falling asleep in their sleep space rather than on you and then being transferred.

Allow your child a comforter. Security items at bedtime are often helpful for children who need an item to feel safe sleeping in their own sleep space. This can be a toy, a blanket or a doll. It can be introduced safely from 7 months old onwards, and you can do so by including this item when you cuddle or comfort your child to help them attach to it.

Keep check-ins brief and boring. If you need to check in on your child over night for whatever reason, make sure that it is not prolonged and just for comfort. Keep it quiet and boring to avoid stimulating them which can further exacerbate the wake.