

Sleep troubles in a child with
Autism, and ways to manage it!

GOOD NIGHT LITTLE ONE



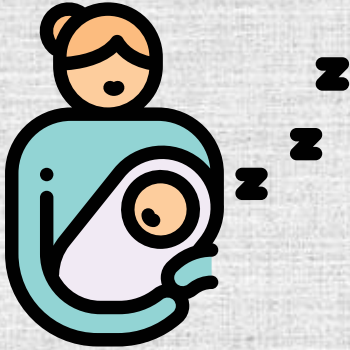
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References

1. The terms 'social story' and 'social stories' are trademarks originated and owned by Carol Gray.
<https://carolgraysocialstories.com>
2. Fifteen-minute consultation on problems in the healthy child: sleep
Jessica R Turnbull, Michael Farquhar.
ADC Education and Practice edition.
3. Sleep and Autism Spectrum Disorders
Ann M Reynolds, Beth A Malow,
Paediatric Clinics of North America.



Does your child wake up frequently at night or have trouble going to sleep?

50-80% of children with autistic spectrum disorder have sleep problems.

This affects all levels of function and intelligence.



What may cause sleep troubles?

Research is beginning to see multiple causes for sleep disturbances in Autism:



Problems with the wiring of the brain

Imbalance in systems that regulate chemical messages required for the natural process of sleep.

Not practicing good sleep hygiene

Other medical co-morbidities of Autism such as Epilepsy , GI-related problems and ADHD.

Other medical problems like asthma and eczema.

Sleep disorders such as sleep walking and restless leg syndrome

Disorders of breathing like obstructive sleep apnea

Behavior problems such as anxiety

These are some of the common reasons for sleep disruption in children with Autism.

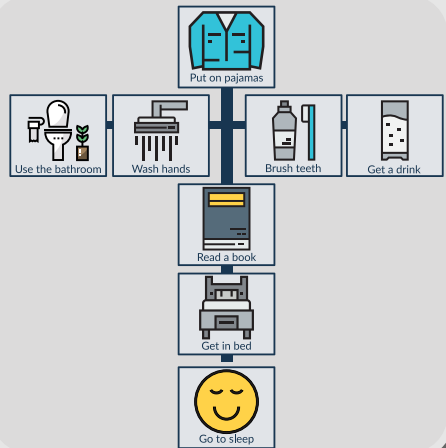
Children with autism will benefit from having a visual routine in the evening which can promote good sleep at night.



Bedtime Routine

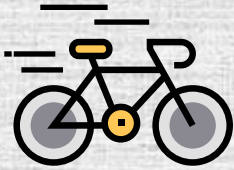
Time for bed

- Put on pajamas
- Use the bathroom
- Wash hands
- Brush teeth
- Get a drink
- Read a book
- Get in bed
- Go to sleep



Understand good
sleep practices

Tips to help promote good sleep

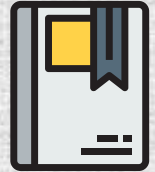


Tire out with physical activity

Physical exertion will make your child tired, thereby pushing him/her to sleep at night.

By reading social stories of sleep routines, and by observing other kids go to sleep your child may want to imitate their manner.

Read social stories

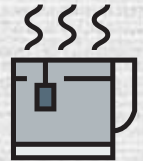


Consistent bedtime

Make sure your child goes to bed at the same time everyday, thus establishing a routine.

This will reduce the chance of going to toilet during night (nocturia).

No liquids 1-1.5 hrs before bedtime



No stimulating drink

Avoid giving the child any drink with caffeine or sugar

Keep a visual schedule with pictures of bedtime routine.

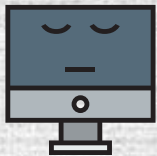
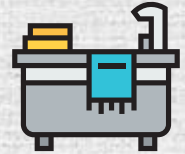
Keep a visual schedule of sleep routine



Tips to help promote good sleep

Let the child wind-down doing things that may relax him/her before bedtime e.g. play board games, listen to soothing music, take a bath, have a massage or do yoga

Do something calming before bedtime

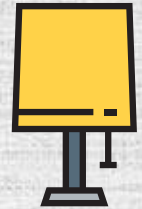


No screentime before bed

Strictly prohibit the child from using a cell phone, laptop or notepad at least 1hr before bedtime

Maintain a low light setting in the child's bedroom. Use a red light if a night light is required. Harsh light will interfere with natural formation of melatonin.

Low light atmosphere

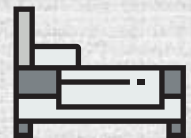


Give the child a bed buddy

Maintain a transitional object, such as a soft toy that the child will start associating with bedtime. This will build confidence and form a healthy sleep association.

Work towards getting the child to sleeping in his/her own bed

Practice sleeping alone



Set a limit on 'fuss time'

Set a gentle limit on "fuss time" before sleep by saying things like "I will give you one last kiss/hug before you must go to bed"

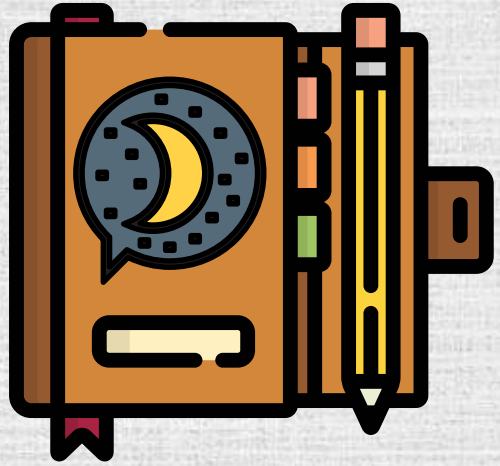
When do you meet your doctor?



- ★ If you have practiced the sleep hygiene measures as above and your child is still not able to sleep, your child may benefit from melatonin.
- ★ If your child is snoring at night.
- ★ If your child has poor nutrition and is a fussy eater.
- ★ If your child has some episodes of funny turns at night. It will be good if you are able to take a video of these episodes.
- ★ If your child also has ADHD in addition to ASD.

However your doctor will have to rule out medical problems and recommend maintaining a sleep diary before prescribing medication.

If you observe sleep-related trouble in your child, then please consult with your Paediatric Neurologist for further assessment and intervention.



Your doctor has given you a sleep questionnaire and asked you to start maintaining a sleep diary. Why is that?

Detailed history keeping of sleep-related problems is key for effective diagnosis of the problem.

Your doctor may ask for a 3 week sleep diary before considering to prescribe melatonin.



Sleep diary maintenance as an everyday habit captures the following details



- ☰ Daytime routine
- ☰ Daytime functioning
- ☰ Bedtime routine
- ☰ Waking up during the night, estimated durations and associated behaviors
- ☰ Mood during the day.



For downloading a free sleep diary template, please visit
www.nayi-disha.org



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We are a not-for-profit organization aimed at empowering families of persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities through the medium of technology.



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