

For Immediate Release:

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Sleep important to children

ARDMORE, Okla. –During the summer children may get out of the habit of getting to bed at a normal time and with school right around the corner, it is important to understand that getting the right amount of sleep is vital to the development of children and teens.

A child’s behavior can directly reflect his lack of sleep in a way which may not be obvious right away, said Sandy Lackey, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service family and consumer sciences educator.

“When adults are tired, they can either be grumpy or have low energy,” she said. “A child can either become overexcited or disagreeable - they have extremes in behavior. Lack of adequate sleep can negatively impact performance in school, memory, decisions and behavior.”

Children’s sleep requirements fall within a predictable range of hours based on their age, but each child has a single distinctive set of sleep needs.

Lackey said children ages 1 to 3 need approximately 10 to 13 hours of sleep. It is important to notice the time of night when toddlers begin to show signs of sleepiness and try to establish this time as their regular bedtime.

“Oftentimes parents make the mistake of thinking if they keep their child up later, they may be sleepier at bedtime. Actually, a child has a more difficult time sleeping if they are overtired,” she said. “It is good to establish a bedtime routine to help a child relax and get ready for sleep. This routine may be 15 to 30 minutes before bedtime and may include reading or bathing.”

As for preschoolers, Lackey suggests them getting around 10 to 12 hours of sleep per night, but says if a 5-year-old child gets enough sleep at night, then they usually no longer need a nap during the day.

Children ages 6 to 9 need approximately 10 hours of sleep a night. Occasionally, children at this age need one-on-one time with parents, without siblings. Lackey said bedtime is a good opportunity to give your child this private time he or she needs.

“This particular time can be used for small discussions and this will help prepare the child for sleep,” she said.

A little over nine hours of sleep is recommended for children ages 10 to 12. Yet, it is up to the parents to determine the amount of rest needed by their child.

Teens need about eight to nine and a half hours of sleep per night. As they progress through puberty, they actually need more.

“Teens keep a hectic schedule that often interferes with sleep, resulting in them becoming sleep deprived,” Lackey said. “When sleep deprivation adds up over time, an hour less per night can feel like a full night without sleep by the end of the week.”

Adolescents’ sleep patterns change in that their bodies want to stay up late and wake up later. This leads to catching up on sleep on the weekends. In an ideal world, a teenager would go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning.

Lackey suggests these tips to help children ease into a good night’s sleep:

- Include a winding-down period in the evening routine, such as talking or reading.
- Stick to a bedtime, telling your child both a half hour and 10 minutes in advance.
- Let your child pick out his/her pajamas and pick which stuffed animal he/she would like to take to bed.
- For a feeling of security, tuck your child into bed.
- For an older child, or teenager, encourage them to establish a regular bedtime that allows them to get good sleep on a regular basis.

“There may not be one sure way to raise a good sleeper, yet every parent should be encouraged to know that most children have the ability to sleep well,” Lackey said. “Trying early on to establish healthy habits is the key to good sleep habits for a lifetime.”

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