

Making sure your children get the proper amount of sleep leads to better quality of life

27 October 2010, By Evie Polsley

We all know that pulling all-nighters, being overly caffeinated and overly stimulated have become a part of college life, but the reality is that even school-age children are dealing with these scenarios as well. In fact, approximately 70 percent of children under the age of 10 have difficulty falling asleep or have problems that diminish their quality of sleep. This means that children are a large part of the 70 million Americans who suffer from sleep deprivation.

"Lack of sleep can cause a lot of stress and difficulty for a child. Kids can have a hard time concentrating, which causes problems in school. There can be physical complications, such as headaches, and it can even cause a child to have a more negative outlook on life," said Dr. Hannah Chow, a pediatrician at Loyola University Health System. "It's important for parents to know how much sleep their child needs and then make sure they get it."

According to Chow, toddlers should be getting 10 to 12 hours of sleep a night with a 1- to 3-hour nap during the day. School-age kids should get no less than 10 hours of sleep and teens need at least 9 to 10 hours.

"Most families are a lot busier today than ever before. Parents want to make sure they still have time to be together as a family. To find that time it's often sleep hours that get cut," Chow said. "Sleep is the only time our brains have a break and are not being constantly bombarded by stimulation. Our bodies need a chance to rest and recharge, this only comes with sleep."

No matter a child's age, Chow suggests parents fiercely protect the amount of sleep their [children](#) get to help kids have a better quality of life.

"Parents need to learn how to say 'no' and protect the time their children need to sleep. Better sleep allows kids to be less stressed, which leads to a

better quality of life," Chow said.

Here are few tips to help kids get the sleep they need:

- Create a simple sleep routine and stick to it. Long elaborate bedtime routines should be avoided. Get firm at bedtime and make sure kids understand the importance of sleep.

- Set limits. Consider stopping all stimulating activity an hour before bedtime. Turn off the TV, take away the cell phone and shut down video games and computers. This will help the mind and body relax.

- Absolutely no TVs, video games or cell phones in the bedroom. Use this downtime as a chance to connect with your child. It's a great time to talk to your children about their day and to touch base about what is happening in their lives. If you have a teenager, it might be the only chance you get.

Chow encourages parents, especially of younger children, to have a sleep routine that allows children to fall asleep on their own. For instance, if you rock a child to sleep they may not be able to fall asleep if there is no motion.

"Children need both quality and quantity of sleep. Help your kids develop good sleeping habits when they're young so they keep them as they grow. We can never get back the sleep we lose," Chow said. "There will always be those special occasions when there will be a break in routine, but the less you deviate from your children's [sleep](#) schedule the happier they'll be."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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