

Your Back-to-School Good Sleep Guide

The new school year is just around the corner, which means the lazy, relaxed days of summer are about to be replaced with hectic school mornings, homework and after school activities. Most likely, your kids have been staying up late and sleeping in during the summer break, so getting them back to a healthy sleep routine may be a challenge.

Kids need more sleep than you may think to function adequately during the day. If uncertain how much sleep your child needs to be at his/her best, consider the following guidelines:

- Ages 5-8: 10-11 hours per night
- Ages 9-12: 9.5-10 hours per night
- Ages 13-18: 8.5-9.5 hours per night

It's no surprise that the effects of poor sleep are very similar for children and adults. Perhaps your own sleep patterns have shifted over the summer, and it's time for the whole family to undergo a sleep tune up. The following recommendations are widely agreed upon by physicians and sleep experts, and can be used to get the whole family ready for the faster pace of the school year:

1. **Start the transition ASAP.** About 2-3 weeks before the start of the school year, start the routine of getting everyone to bed earlier. Start by moving bed times and wake times back about 15 minutes from the regular summer schedule, and gradually keep moving back every few days until you hit the appropriate school night bedtime. This will reduce the shock of the new, earlier wake up times during the first couple of weeks of school.
2. **Consistency is key.** It's important to stay consistent with your bedtime schedule once you've made the transition, meaning weekends too. Allowing kids to stay up late on the weekends can damage the routine you're trying to establish.
3. **Develop a relaxing bedtime routine.** A relaxing bath or walk after dinner, a book with a parent for younger kids, or silent reading time for older kids, are all good ways to wind down to sleep.
4. **Turn off electronics.** All electronics – including TVs, computers and mobile devices – should be shut down at least one hour before target bedtimes. Not only is digital content mentally stimulating, but the artificial light emitting from them tricks the brain into thinking it should be awake.
5. **Create an ideal sleep environment.** We should associate our beds only with sleep – not reading, checking email or watching TV. Make sure the sleep space is quiet, dimly lit or dark, and cool (between 68 and 72 degrees). White noise from a fan or sound machine is very helpful for some who struggle to fall asleep quickly.
6. **Healthy food and exercise.** Kids should get plenty of physical exercise during the day, up to an hour or so before dinnertime. Avoid feeding children fatty or processed foods, and keep sugar and caffeine intake to a minimum. Poor nutrition is the most likely cause of sleep disturbances, for both children and adults.

Remember the impact of a positive role model. Parents who eat well, prioritize physical activity, and invest in their own proper care and rest, raise healthy children who prioritize these things as well. And if someone in your family is struggling with sleep problems, don't assume it's insignificant. There are many

sleep disorders that can affect both adults and children, and that are easily treatable with the partnership of a qualified physician.

The Sleep Disorders Laboratory at Woodland Heights recently received program accreditation from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM). To receive accreditation for a five-year period, a sleep center must meet or exceed all standards for professional health care as designated by the AASM. The collaboration between physicians, sleep technicians and the entire team is to be commended. For more information, visit WoodlandHeights.net/Sleep.

Kyle Swift is the CEO at Woodland Heights Medical Center. He can be reached at kyle.swift@woodlandheights.net. Woodland Heights is owned in part by physicians.