

## Sleep after a brain injury

Getting enough sleep is important for all children. It is even more important after your child has a brain injury. Sleep allows both the body and the brain to heal. However, because sleep is controlled by many parts of the brain, sleep problems are common after a brain injury.

### Why is sleep important?

Poor sleep can make a brain injury worse. Some of the ways that sleep helps the brain are:

- Giving brain cells a chance to shut down and repair themselves. Without sleep these cells cannot work properly.
- Shutting down activity to the brain areas that control emotions, decision making, and social skills. These areas are often affected after a brain injury. Deep sleep helps these areas heal.
- During sleep, new learning from that day is repeated. This may help improve memory and learning.

### What are the signs of poor sleep?

- Irritability
- Trouble concentrating
- Lack of energy during the day
- Poor school performance
- Headaches
- Depression
- Hyperactivity
- Trouble learning
- Poor memory
- Trouble processing information
- Trouble interacting with family and friends



### What are some common sleep problems?

After a brain injury, your child may have some of these sleep problems:

- **Insomnia (in-SOMM-nee-ah):** Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep through the night
- **Too sleepy during the day:** Extreme drowsiness even after good sleep
- **Delayed sleep phase:** Not able to fall asleep until late and waking up late in the morning
- **Sleep apnea:** Pauses in breathing during sleep (waking up and/or snoring)
- **Restless legs syndrome (RLS):** Urge to move the legs often when trying to sleep
- **Bruxism (BRUKS-is-emm):** Clenching or grinding teeth
- **Sleepwalking:** Walking or doing other activities while in a deep sleep

## How much sleep does my child need?

This chart shows recommended amounts of sleep for children without brain injury. After a brain injury, your child may need more sleep to help heal.

Age	Sleep Time per 24 Hours
Infants 4–12 months	12–16 hours (frequent naps)
Toddlers 1–3 years of age	11–14 hours (fewer naps)
Children 3–5 years of age	10–13 hours (infrequent naps)
Children 5–12 years of age	9–12 hours
Teenagers 13–18 years of age	8–10 hours
* Recommendations from American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM)	

## What are some things that cause sleep problems?

Many other things can affect sleep besides brain injury, including:

- Medicines
- Too little physical activity
- Too much daytime napping
- Pain
- Depression
- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Nicotine

## How can I help my child have better sleep?

Daytime routines, television, diet, medicines, and general health all affect sleep. Here are some ways your child can sleep better:

- Set an alarm to wake up at the same time each day
- Exercise regularly
- Limit TV and electronics time, especially 2 hours before bed
- Get sunlight each day (outdoor sunlight is best)
- Limit daytime napping
- Avoid caffeine and sugar for five hours before bedtime
- Have the same bedtime routine every day, even on the weekends
- Go to bed at the same time each night
- Stretch, meditate, or listen to calm music before sleeping
- Make the bedroom quiet and dark with no distractions
- Avoid eating, reading, or watching TV in bed
- Sleep only in your bed

## What if my child still has sleep problems?

If your child continues to have sleep problems after having a good sleep routine, talk to your healthcare provider about other solutions. Sleep medicines and other natural remedies may be helpful for your child.

### Notes

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