

Let's Talk About...

Sleep and Brain Injury

Sleep is very important when the body is healing. This is especially important when a person has a brain injury. Sleep allows both the body and the brain to heal. Sleep is complicated. Sleep is controlled by many parts of the brain. Sleep problems are very common after a brain injury. This is true whether the injury is mild or severe. There are many different kinds of sleep problems. The type of sleep problem depends on where and how badly the brain is injured.

Why is sleep important?

If a child does not get enough good sleep, they can have poor brain function, trouble concentrating, irritability, and fatigue. Poor sleep can make a brain injury worse. Some of the ways that sleep helps the brain are:

- Sleep gives brain cells a chance to shut down and repair themselves. Without sleep these cells cannot work properly.
- Deep sleep shuts 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 can allow these areas to 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
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of energy during the day
- Poor school performance
- Headaches

- Depression
- Hyperactivity
- Difficulty learning
- Poor memory
- Difficulty processing information
- Difficulty interacting with family and friends

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	Total Naps and Night Time Sleep
Birth – 30 days	16 to 18 hours
1 to 2 months	16 to 18 hours
3 months	15 hours with 3 naps
6 to 9 months	14 to 15 hours with 2 naps
12 months	14 hours with 1 to 2 naps
12 to 24 months	12 to 14 hours, fewer naps
3 to 5 years	11 to 13 hours, naps infrequent
5 to 10 years	10 to 11 hours
11 to 18 years	8.5 to 9.25 hours

What are some common sleep problems?

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

- **Insomnia** (in-SOMM-knee-ah): Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep through the night. This often causes low energy during the day.
- **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 that causes your child to wake often at night and be sleepy during the day. Frequently these children snore.
- **Restless Leg Syndrome:** Frequent urge to move the legs when trying to sleep.
- **Bruxism (BRUKS.-is-emm):** Clenching or grinding teeth.
- **Sleepwalking:** Walking or doing other activities while in a deep sleep.

What are some things that cause sleep problems?

Many other things can affect sleep besides brain injury. Some of these are:

- 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 suggestions to help improve your child's sleep:

- Set an alarm and wake up at the same time each day.
- Exercise regularly.
- Limit TV and electronics time.
- Get sunlight each day. Outdoor sunlight is best.
- Limit daytime napping.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, and sugar for five hours before bedtime.
- Have the same bedtime routine every day.
- Go to bed at the same time each night.
- Stretch, meditate, or listen to calm music before sleep.
- Make the bedroom quiet and dark with no distractions.
- Do not eat, read, or watch TV in bed.
Your child should only sleep in their own 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. Discuss other solutions. This might include medicines and natural remedies.

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