

## WHAT ARE SLEEP DISTURBANCES?

---

Children and adults diagnosed with ADHD or other neurodevelopmental conditions commonly experience difficulty sleeping at night. One quarter to a half of parents report that children with ADHD not only have difficulty falling asleep but also staying asleep during the night. Studies have consistently shown that higher rates of sleep disorders occur among children with ADHD. The onset of associated sleep disturbances associated can vary but they generally appear around adolescence.

Research has shown that sleep disorders may account for some of the behavioural difficulties in children with ADHD. They propose that children who display daytime sleepiness use hyperactivity as a coping mechanism to get them through the day. In addition, sleepiness throughout the day is thought to worsen the symptoms of ADHD.

## WHAT CAUSES SLEEP DISTURBANCES?

---

Difficulties with sleeping may be uniquely related to an individual's ADHD or related to another co-existing disorder such as anxiety, depression or oppositional defiant disorder. For example, the child may be resisting to go to bed because of oppositional behaviour. Sleep difficulties can also be the result of stimulant medication such as methylphenidate. If you think that your medication is causing sleep difficulties then it is best to discuss this with your doctor so that you can get the disrupted sleep under control.

Sleep disorders occurring alongside ADHD can also explain why many people experience disturbed sleep. Common disorders among those with ADHD are:

- Restless Leg Syndrome- *disruptive sleep and repetitive kicking movements.*
- Obstructive Sleep Apnoea- *breathing difficulties, restless sleep and loud snoring.*

It is important to manage sleep disorders otherwise ADHD symptoms may be exacerbated during the daytime which can negatively impact concentration and academic functioning.

## TIPS FOR A GOOD NIGHTS SLEEP

The National Sleep Foundation has tips to help children and adults sleep, helping conditions such as ADHD to become more manageable.

### DO'S

- Maintain a regular bed and wake schedule, even at weekends.
- Keep bedroom quiet, cool, dark and comfortable.
- Restrict the use of bed for sleeping only.
- Set a realistic bedtime and stick to it.
- Do plenty of exercise (but, at least three hours before bedtime).
- Discuss any side effects of medication that could impact the quantity or quality of sleep.



### DON'T's

- Have caffeine products from late afternoon onwards.
- Watch TV or play video games before bedtime.
- Keep TV's, computers, video games and other electronic equipment in the bedroom.
- Eat or drink alcohol too close to bedtime.



For children a routine before bedtime is crucial to help them learn the events that lead up to bedtime. A short routine is best which could include: Having a bath→Pyjamas on→ Having a drink→ Brushing teeth→ Reading a story and or singing/listening to calming music.

One helpful tip is to have a definite end point to the routine; this can help the child associate this end point with falling asleep. An example could be saying goodnight to your child. At this point the child will know they have to go to sleep.

## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

If you or a loved one are experiencing problems with sleep at night, or alertness during the day, be sure to talk things through with your doctor. He or she can also rule out any other factors that may be contributing to the sleep disruption including anxiety, depression, obstructive sleep apnoea, restless legs syndrome etc.

Here are some useful websites and smart phone apps.

British Sleep Society- [www.sleeping.org.uk](http://www.sleeping.org.uk)

The Sleep Council- [www.sleepcouncil.org.uk](http://www.sleepcouncil.org.uk)

American National Sleep Foundation- [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

British Snoring and Sleep Apnoea Association- [www.britishsnoring.co.uk](http://www.britishsnoring.co.uk)

#### Smartphone Apps

- *Deep Relaxation: a relaxation app that lasts around 30 minutes where you can learn to relax, unwind and de-stress. Free from the app store.*
- *Sleep Pillow Sounds: this app provides you with a set of "high quality ambient sounds". These sounds help to create a relaxed environment that assists you into a cyclical sleeping pattern.*
- *Snorelab: an app to record samples of your snoring during the night and to show you how loud and when you snored. The app also provides remedies to reduce your snoring and tells you the effectiveness of them.*