

## Why Children Struggle with Sleep - and What to Do



### Highlights

Most children fall asleep easily and stay asleep through the night with a good bedtime routine and sleep environment.

Children with autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are more likely to experience sleep problems.

Lack of sleep can cause children to be tired, irritable, and have difficulty concentrating or remembering.

A regular bedtime routine is crucial for children with insomnia, and avoiding screens, exercise, and meals close to bedtime can help.

Other sleep disorders children may experience include sleepwalking, night terrors, teeth grinding, or sleep apnoea.

### In This Article

What Are Sleep Disorders in Children?

Insomnia

Tips for Dealing With Insomnia

Sleepwalking

Night Terrors

Tips for Dealing With Night Terrors

Hypersomnia  
Teeth Grinding  
Tips for Dealing With Teeth Grinding  
Tools And Assistance

## **What Are Sleep Disorders in Children?**

Sleep disorders are conditions where normal sleep patterns are disturbed, affecting the quality and quantity of your child's sleep. This can result in difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or feeling rested during the day.

Children need enough sleep to grow and develop properly. Good sleep habits help them fall asleep and stay asleep.

Babies and young children often face challenges with sleep, but over time, a good bedtime routine can help them settle. Some children develop sleep disorders that require professional attention and treatment. Sleep disorders are more common in children with autism or ADHD.

Common sleep disorders in children include:

Insomnia  
Sleepwalking  
Night terrors  
Sleep apnoea  
Hypersomnia  
Teeth grinding

### **Insomnia**

Insomnia is when your child takes longer than 30 minutes to fall asleep. They may have trouble falling asleep when they first go to bed, staying asleep, or going back to sleep if they wake up during the night.

If your child doesn't get enough sleep, they may become tired and irritable, affecting their ability to concentrate, learn, or remember things. Parents may also become tired and frustrated if their child wakes up frequently at night.

Occasionally, insomnia can be linked to anxiety. Consult a doctor if insomnia becomes frequent.

## **Tips for Dealing With Insomnia**

Follow a good sleep routine for 2 weeks, including:

- A regular bedtime and wake-up time
- A relaxing pre-bedtime routine with a bath and story
- Avoiding daytime naps for older children

Help your child fall asleep by:

- Ensuring there is no excess noise or light in the room
- Avoiding caffeine (e.g., cola or sports drinks)
- Keeping phones and devices out of the room
- Encouraging exercise during the day
- Ensuring exposure to natural sunlight
- Avoiding meals, exercise, and screen time close to bedtime

If your child still struggles to fall asleep, consult a doctor, who may recommend melatonin.

## **Sleepwalking**

Sleepwalking occurs when a child gets up and moves around while still asleep. It is fairly common between ages 4 and 8 years, and most children grow out of it. Sleepwalking can run in families, but there is usually no clear cause.

Sleepwalking is more likely if your child is overtired, has a fever, or is stressed or anxious.

A sleepwalking child may get out of bed, walk around the house, climb stairs, or even leave the house. They may talk, change clothes, or use the toilet while asleep.

They typically have a blank expression and do not respond to others. They will not remember the episode the next day.

## **Night Terrors**

Night terrors occur when a child wakes up seeming scared or distressed. They usually happen within the first few hours of sleep and can last 5 to 10 minutes. The child may scream or call out and may have more than one episode in a night.

During a night terror, the child's eyes are wide open but unfocused, and they may not recognize anyone. They typically don't remember the terror the next day.

### **Tips for Dealing With Night Terrors**

Remain calm and wait for the episode to pass.

Do not attempt to comfort or wake them, as this may confuse them and make it harder to return to sleep.

Night terrors are a normal part of development and can happen to healthy children.

## **Hypersomnia**

Hypersomnia is when a child feels constantly tired, even after a full night of sleep. They may sleep more than usual at night and take long naps during the day but still feel fatigued.

Children with hypersomnia may become irritable and have trouble concentrating or remembering things.

Consult a doctor if you believe your child has hypersomnia, as there are treatments that may help.

## **Teeth Grinding**

Teeth grinding, or bruxism, occurs when a child grinds or clenches their teeth while asleep. This can also happen when they are feeling angry, upset, or anxious.

While occasional grinding is not a concern, frequent grinding or clenching can

damage the teeth or jaw.

### **Tips for Dealing With Teeth Grinding**

If grinding is frequent, consult your child's doctor or dentist. A mouthguard may help.

Identify any stressors your child may be experiencing and try to alleviate them.

Plan a quiet time before bedtime, regardless of your child's age.

### **Tools And Assistance**

If you are concerned about your child's sleep patterns, consider speaking with a doctor or sleep specialist. Professional support can help identify the underlying causes of sleep issues and suggest effective treatments or behavior strategies.

There are a variety of methods available to support children with sleep disorders, including behavioral therapy, counseling, and, in some cases, medical treatment. Parents can also access educational materials, sleep training programs, and practical tips for creating a supportive sleep environment at home.

It's important to remember that many childhood sleep problems can be improved with consistent routines, a calming bedtime atmosphere, and attention to your child's individual needs.