

Sleepwalking in Children: What Parents Need to Know



Highlights

Sleepwalking occurs when a child moves around while still asleep. It is common in young children and usually resolves on its own. Most children who sleepwalk do not have emotional or behavioral issues. Consult a doctor if sleepwalking causes issues for your child or family. Ensure your child's safety by removing trip hazards, locking doors, and blocking stairs.

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What is sleepwalking?

Sleepwalking occurs when a child moves around while asleep. It is especially common between the ages of 4 and 8 years. Most children outgrow sleepwalking as they get older, but some may continue to experience it into adulthood.

Symptoms of sleepwalking in children

Sleepwalking typically happens in the late evening. A child who sleepwalks may:

Get out of bed and walk around

Open doors

Change clothes

Eat or drink

Urinate in unusual places, such as on the floor or in a cupboard

While sleepwalking, their eyes may be open, but they will appear unfocused. They may speak but will not respond coherently. They usually return to bed on their own or with gentle guidance. In the morning, they will not remember the episode.

Causes of sleepwalking in children

Sleepwalking occurs when a child transitions from deep sleep to a lighter sleep. The exact cause is unknown, but it often runs in families.

Sleepwalking is more likely if a child:

Is stressed

Goes to bed late

Is overtired

Has a fever or is unwell

Has other sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea

Possible problems associated with sleepwalking

Children who sleepwalk may:

Injure themselves by bumping into objects
Disrupt their own sleep and that of others in the household

When to see a doctor

Consult a doctor if your child:

Feels excessively tired during the day
Sleepwalks multiple times per night
Disrupts the sleep of family members
Snores loudly or gasps for breath while sleeping
Wets the bed or their clothes during an episode
Has unusual sleep patterns that concern you

Can sleepwalking be treated?

Most children do not require medical treatment for sleepwalking.

How to manage your child's sleepwalking

To handle sleepwalking safely:

Avoid waking your child abruptly; instead, guide them gently back to bed.
Keep calm when discussing it in the morning, as they may not remember.

Make the home environment safe by:

Installing gates on stairs
Locking doors and windows
Removing obstacles to prevent tripping
Avoiding top bunks for sleeping
Using a baby monitor or door alarm for awareness

If your child sleeps away from home, inform caregivers about their sleepwalking to ensure proper precautions. Making sure your child gets enough rest before overnight stays may also help.

Preventing sleepwalking

To help reduce sleepwalking episodes:

Establish a consistent sleep schedule

Create a calming bedtime routine

Prevent overtiredness by ensuring they get enough rest

Tools And Assistance

If you're looking for more support on sleepwalking in children, consider these options:

Home safety tools: Use childproof locks, stair gates, or door alarms to reduce risks during sleepwalking episodes.

Talk to a healthcare provider: A pediatrician or sleep specialist can evaluate your child's sleep habits and offer guidance.

Parental support groups: Online communities and local parenting groups can offer insights and shared experiences.

Professional mental health support: If stress or emotional factors may be contributing, a child psychologist can help.