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Avoid sleeping pills for children with insomnia

There are often safer, more effective ways to treat sleep issues

Some adults look back on childhood as a time when sleeping was easy. But many children do have trouble sleeping. The problem can be so bad that parents and doctors sometimes turn to sleeping pills as a solution.

But often, sleeping pills are not the best solution.

Sleep drugs aren't made for children.

There are no prescription drugs approved in the U.S. to treat childhood insomnia. But some children are given:

- Antihistamines like diphenhydramine (Nytol, Somnex, Benadryl Allergy, and others, including generic)
- Hypnotic sleep aids such as zolpidem (Ambien and generic)

Some doctors recommend melatonin. There has been little research on its use in children. The long-term risks are not known.

There is a risk of overdose with these drugs, since the doctor must change the adult dose to fit your child's weight.



If your child's doctor recommends a drug:

- Ask about the side effects and risks.
- Ask if it will really help your child's sleep problem.
- Ask about non-drug solutions.

Change bedtime behaviors.

Children can have sleep problems for many reasons. The reasons can be different at different ages. Most childhood insomnia is caused by the way parents and children interact about sleeping. Changing bedtime habits and behaviors can often solve common sleep problems.

Tips for a better night's sleep



Should you limit your child's use of electronic devices at night?

Whether it is a few hours in front of the TV or reading on a tablet, many children spend time in front of a screen. This can harm your child's sleep:

- Light from screens can fool the brain into thinking it is daytime.
- The use of electronic devices can encourage your child to stay awake and keep having fun.
- Using electronics at night can make it harder for your child to fall asleep or stay asleep.
- Avoiding screens for one to two hours before bedtime may help your child sleep.
- It also helps to dim the light on the device.

Using screens affects adult's sleep in the same way! So it may help you sleep if you set an example by turning off your own electronic devices.

Teach your child good sleep habits.

These tips can prevent and solve many sleep problems, for both children and adults:

- Set a time to go to bed and a time to wake up. Be consistent.
- Make sure the bedroom is dark, quiet, and comfortable.
- Keep TVs and computers out of the bedroom.
- Limit the use of electronic devices of any kind before bedtime (see the Advice column).

Help for young children.

Changing bedtime behaviors can often help young children sleep better. For example:

- Don't stay with your child until he or she falls asleep. The child may later wake up, realize no parent is present, and become upset. Instead, try leaving the room as your child gets sleepy, so he or she learns to be comfortable sleeping alone.
- Don't reward your child if he or she refuses to go to bed by using stalling tactics or throwing tantrums. Instead, give a reward if your child starts to show good bedtime behaviors.

Help for older children.

If your pre-teen or teen has stress or anxiety that prevents good sleep, a short period of counseling may help. Also discourage your older child from staying up late and then sleeping in on weekends. A consistent sleep schedule—going to bed and waking up at the same time every day—is a smart idea for all ages.

When should your child see a doctor?

Sleep problems can be the sign of more serious issues, like anxiety, depression, or an eating disorder. If you have concerns, talk to your child's doctor. The doctor may refer your child to a counselor or a sleep physician for help.

This report is for you to use when talking with your health-care provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this report is at your own risk.

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