



## Sleep and the older child

**Lots of things happen during sleep; babies and children grow, their brain develops, their bodies heal and repair, and their brain processes the day. Children who are overtired in the long term can become more active and wanting attention, and this can be mistaken for not being tired.**

Settling and sleeping difficulties are very common in the under fives, and more than half of all children may have difficulties settling or sleeping at some point in childhood.

If you are struggling with a child who is having difficulty going to sleep or staying asleep, don't give up. Please talk to your health visitor who can support you with this. The information in this leaflet contains some top tips to help your child sleep well.

**More information on Page 2**

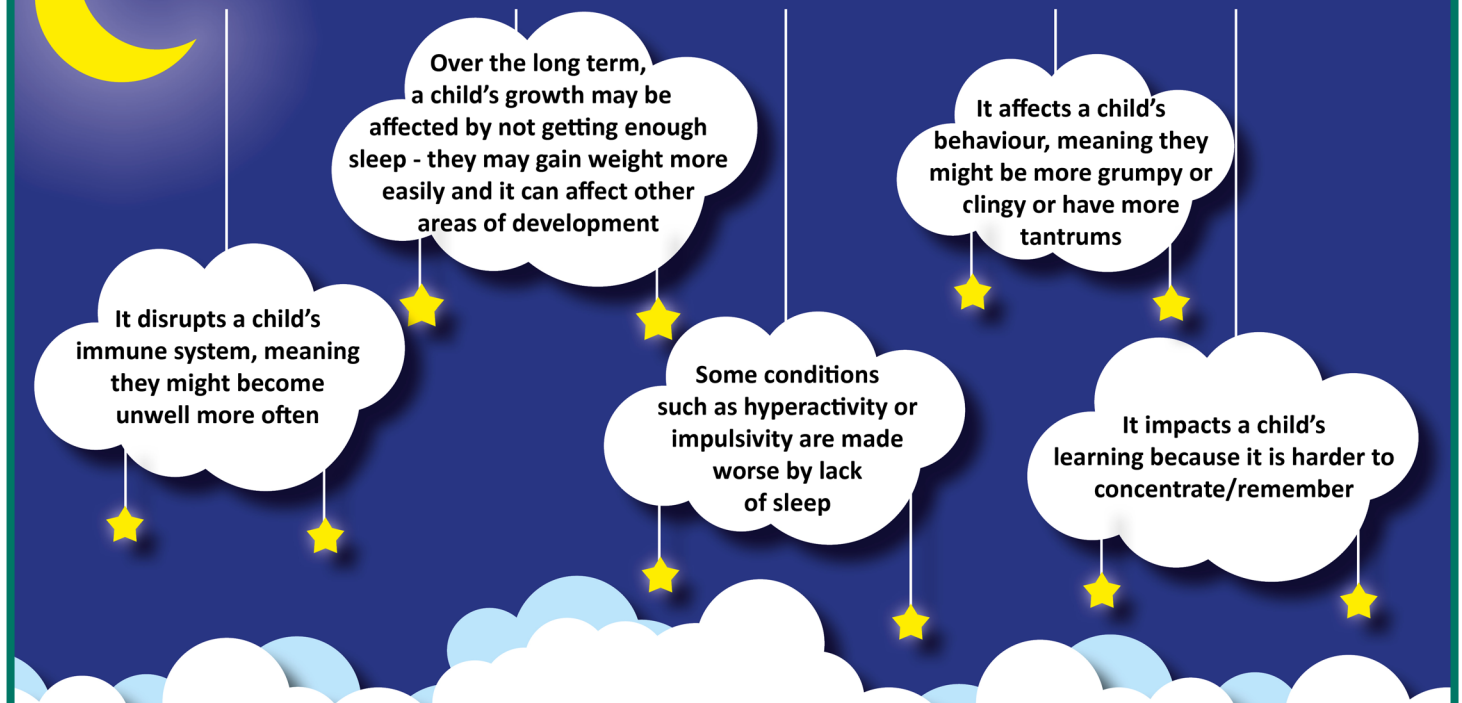
**For additional Parent Tips see [www.ihv.org.uk](http://www.ihv.org.uk)**

The information in this resource was updated on 25/06/2021.

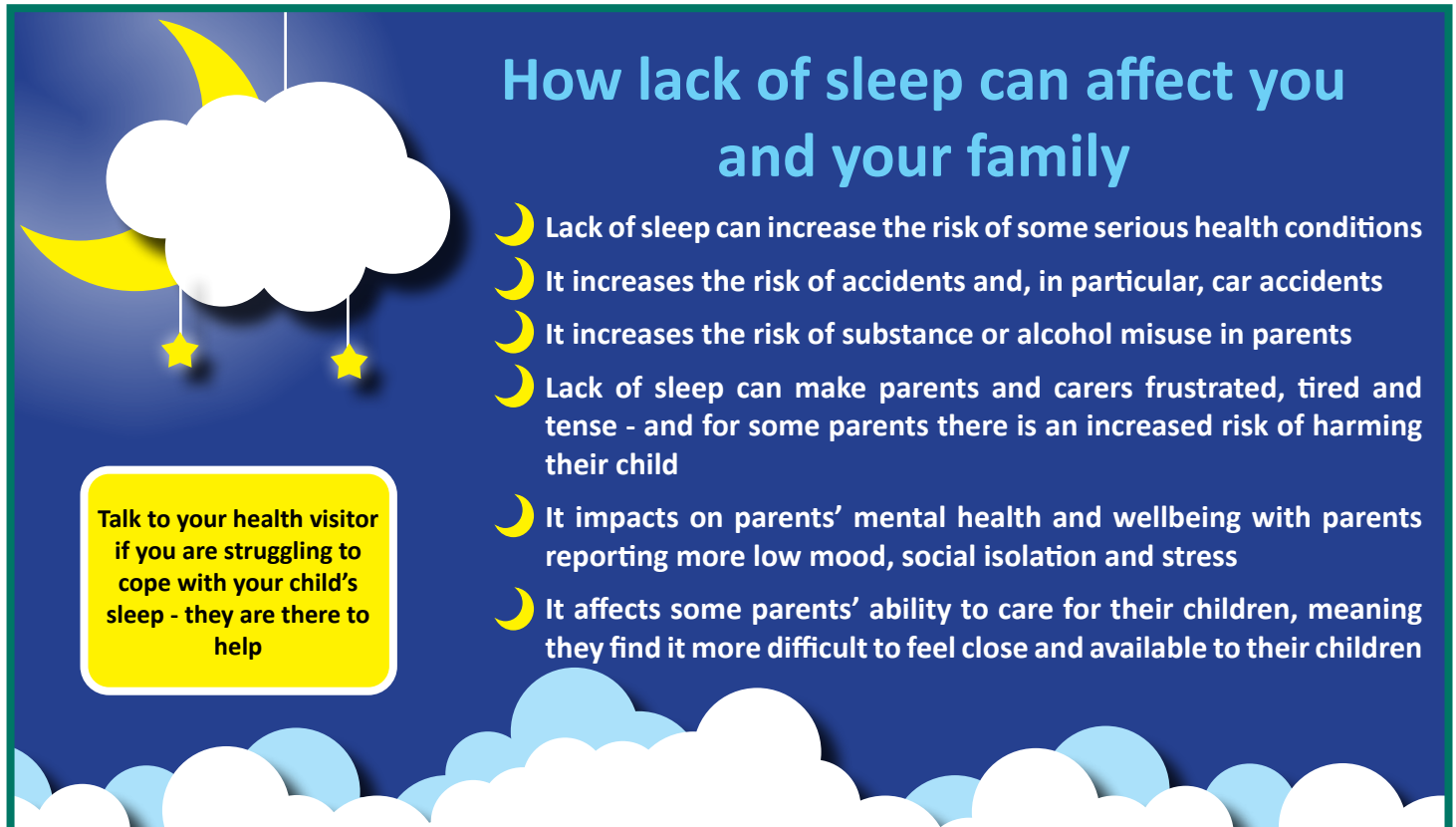
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# Sleep and the older child

## How lack of sleep can affect your child



## How lack of sleep can affect you and your family



[More information on Page 3](#)

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## What your child eats and drinks can affect their sleep

### Helpful foods

- A balanced diet is necessary for a child's growth, development and sleep. Some foods can help with sleep and others can prevent it. Milk is a perfect bedtime drink.
- Offering foods that contain a sleep-inducing natural substance called tryptophan can help.
- Magnesium can help with sleep. Children do not need any special magnesium supplements because there is enough in their food. Foods such as Weetabix, wholemeal bread, brown rice, spinach, quinoa, nuts\*, black beans, tofu, avocados all have plenty of magnesium.

### High tryptophan foods include:

Nuts\* seeds, tofu, cheese, eggs, milk, red meat, chicken, turkey, fish, oats, beans, lentils, grains such as oats, rice, barley wheat, corn, fruit such as apples, bananas, peaches, avocado, and vegetables such as spinach, broccoli, turnip greens, asparagus, onions and seaweed.

\*Whole nuts can be a choking hazard so do not give them to children under 5.



### Unhelpful foods

- Food that has a lot of fat in it, such as biscuits, cheese and crisps for example, can make it more difficult to sleep because they can be more difficult for the stomach to digest and sometimes cause a build-up of stomach acid which is uncomfortable.
- Also, foods that have a lot of protein in, such as yoghurt or cheese, eggs and meat, can make it more difficult to sleep because it takes some time for them to pass through the stomach.

Foods and drinks that contain caffeine/sugar, which is present in tea, coffee, chocolate and some fizzy drinks, can interfere with sleep.



- Take a closer look at what is in your child's food and drink by looking at the food label:

<https://bit.ly/34dLxlc>



## How to help your child to settle and sleep well

1. Having a gentle winding-down time each day helps babies and children settle and sleep.
2. Babies and children like to know what is going to happen next. Letting them know that it's bedtime, starts to get them ready for sleep.
3. Bedtime for each child is likely to vary. Ideally start to get ready for bed about 30-40 minutes before you want them to go to bed.
4. It is helpful to do the same activities at the same time most days such as the time to get up, have a nap, go to bed and eat.
5. Spending time outside in the fresh air playing is important and helps with sleep.
6. Turning lights off during the night and having less light at bedtime helps.
7. Children with special educational needs and disabilities may need extra light and find it more difficult to go to sleep and stay asleep. See "Further information" from Learning Disability Matters and SCOPE.
8. Blue light from phones and screens is unhelpful. It is recommended that children do not watch a screen for 1 hour before bedtime.
9. Think about where your child sleeps and try to make it safe, quiet and comfortable.
10. If your child is unwell, their sleep may be disturbed and unsettled and they need you to help them get better. Once they are well, follow these tips again.

For further help if your child is unwell, please visit the NHS website: <https://bit.ly/3w05bEr>. In addition, the iHV has other Parent Tips resources that you may find useful: <http://bit.ly/2ZpEagN>

On the next page are some suggestions for bedtimes based on findings from research on what helps children to settle and sleep well.

**More information on Page 4**

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## A typical bedtime could involve the following:

Before starting the bedtime countdown, try quiet calming activities outside the bedroom. For example, quiet games, jigsaws, stories etc. Switch the TV off, no screen time for a minimum of 60 minutes before bedtime, you may want to dim the lights a bit.

## Tips for a successful bedtime routine

	Begin the bedtime activities 30-40 minutes before you would like your child to go to sleep.		To help protect children's teeth and establish going to sleep without a milk drink, it is a good idea to feed them or offer milk in a cup before going up to bed. Then teeth can be cleaned before settling into bed without that association of feeding to go to sleep.		A bath can work well but this can excite some children - so it may be a wash, teeth cleaning and into night clothes, whatever works best for you and your child.
	A calming massage may help sleep.		Quiet calming activities, be it relaxing music, lullabies or stories to help induce sleep once they are in bed. Bedtime stories are particularly good and also help with language development.		Comfort objects such as teddy bears or favourite cuddly/soft toys or blankets can help older children to settle but they should never be used with babies or young children due to the risk of sudden infant death.
	Finish in the bedroom, avoid returning to main living areas once the bedtime countdown has begun.		Keep lights low and the room dark at night. If a night light is needed, use orange/red-based light as this does not interfere with sleep.		Tuck your child up in bed, kiss and tell them what you most love about them - no matter what sort of day you have had, you can end on a positive note.

Try to include things in your bedtime routine you can do every evening because this helps children feel secure.

## Further information and useful websites

Magnesium Rich Food - **Cleveland Clinic**: <http://cle.clinic/3v70mIQ>

Parent Tips "Safer sleep" - **Institute of Health Visiting**: <https://bit.ly/3fo1hNL>

Sleep - **Learning Disability Matters**: <https://bit.ly/2NNvtso>

The health impacts of screen time - **Royal College of Paediatrics and Child** - : <http://bit.ly/38mAEX7>

How Blue Light Affects Kids' Sleep - **Sleep Foundation**: <https://bit.ly/30khwVo>

Helping your disabled child sleep - **SCOPE** - : <http://bit.ly/30oPUOM>

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