

QCH Department of Respiratory and Sleep

Healthy Sleeping Habits for Teens with Down syndrome



Sleep is vital for children and teenager's wellbeing.

Teenagers tend to be less regular with their sleep. Their body clock changes delaying their sleep time and the time they wake up. Up to a certain point this is normal but there are other factors that affect their sleep wake rhythm.

Insufficient sleep can affect their daytime behaviour.

Some signs that they are not coping with their changing sleep pattern are feeling sleepy during the day, irritability, aggression, hyperactivity and their ability to learn.

Here are some simple techniques that can help.

1. Establish a regular sleep pattern

This is still important at this age. Going to bed and waking up at the same time each night helps to strengthen their internal body clock and allows their body to synch with their natural pattern.

If your teenager goes to bed late you can gradually make that bedtime earlier until they go to bed at the desired time.

2. Consistent bedtime routine

It is good to have the same bedtime routine every day. This helps your teenager to prepare for sleep and reduces any behavioural difficulties with bedtime resistance.

Engage them in quiet activities such as reading a book, a warm bath. Limit stimulating activities such as physical activity, homework and technology around half an hour before bed.

Sometimes teenagers can find it hard to relax help find activities that help them calm down.

3. Keep a diary

Teenagers need approximately 8-10 hours sleep every night. If they are not getting enough sleep the diary will help you make and monitor changes to get enough sleep to stay happy and healthy.

4. Make sure the room is comfortable

The room should be cool, quiet, comfortable and dark. Make the room a happy calming place to be in. If your child needs a night light this is OK, aim for a red, pink or purple. White or blue are stimulating colours and can affect sleep.

5. Limit Technology

Bright screen light from computers, television, iPads and mobiles can cause increased alertness and affect their sleep. If your teenager is accustomed to using devices before bed, try to choose activities on their device that are passive. These activities can be listening to music, reading an e-book, watching a movie. Try to deter them from playing games on their devices or messaging. No mobiles in room

These rules will be easier to apply in the household when they are followed by the whole family.

6. Food and drink before bed

It is harder to fall asleep if you are hungry. Maybe offer a light snack before bed. No stimulant foods or drink before bed. These include caffeine drinks such as cola and chocolate.

7. Exercise

Daily exercise promotes healthy living but also promotes good sleep. Spending time outdoors in the bright daylight also helps regulate that internal wake sleep body clock.

8. Other things that may be disturbing your teenager's sleep

Children with Down Syndrome are particularly vulnerable to Sleep Apnoea. Sleep apnoea can also re-occur and is common in teenagers. It is linked to obesity which is another important reason to keep an eye on the food they eat and their level of exercise. Some signs of this may include snoring, cough, choke, restlessness, unusual sleeping positions, excessive sweating or mouth breathing.

If you see any of these signs go and see your GP and ask for a referral to a specialist.

Contact us

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