

# Does your child get enough sleep?

BY [Fiona Baker](#)

How to ensure your child gets enough shut-eye.



Chances are the answer is no. And probably neither are you. Sleep is one of the essentials of life yet for many of us it's not something we consider a priority.

"It's like we wear our lack of sleep as some kind of badge of honour," says Australian sleep expert Dr Sarah Blunden. "But the fact is we all need our sleep and while some adults may be able to deal with less than the recommended amount, children can't at all."

Yet the amount of shut-eye our kids are getting is diminishing. A US study out of Brown University Medical School, looked at the sleep routines of 169 children aged one to five. Counting all sleep and naps in a 24-hour period, researchers found that every child was coming up short of the recommended 12-15 hours sleep per day.

The three- to five-year olds were getting less than 9.5 hours sleep – a shortfall of at least 2.5 to 5.5 hours, while the toddlers were short 1.5 to 4.5 hours of sleep.

## So how much sleep do we need?

[The Australian Centre for Education in Sleep](#), where Dr Blunden is a director, has the following recommendations for sleep.

- Babies under 12 months: 14-18 hours throughout the day and night
- Toddlers and pre-schoolers: 12-14 hours per 24-hour period
- Primary school students: 10-12 hours per day

- Teenagers: 9-11 hours per day
- Adults: 7-9 hours per day

In an ideal world, says Dr Blunden, the amount of sleep children get would be at the upper end of these recommended amounts.

## Tips for parents

Here are Dr Blunden's tips on ensuring kids (aged between about 4 and 12) get their required sleep time.

- Regulate bed and wake times. Set limits at bedtime.
- Be aware of the signs of fatigue during the day (hyperactivity, acting out, irritability).
- Have a soothing and gentle routine before bed. Negotiate the routine with your child and make a deal, for example: "We can read two books, but then it's time for bed."

For teens, it's a constant case of catch-up as hormonal changes coupled with the growing electronic stimulation they've got going on (computers, TVs, mobile phones and MP3 players) cause many to be in sleep debt by 10 hours or more a week.

As part of puberty their release of melatonin (the sleepy hormone) is delayed meaning adolescents are often not tired until later in the evening but they still have to get up early for school.

Along with not letting kids have computers and televisions in their bedrooms, Dr Blunden has this advice to help parents manage their teen's growing exhaustion:

- Don't let the weekend or holiday bedtime get too late. This will push the body clock further forward and make it harder to get to sleep earlier when school starts again.
- Napping 20 minutes at about 4pm is better than sleeping in too much on weekend to catch up on sleep debt.

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