

Improving Sleep

Quality sleep is essential for children (and adults) to meet the demands of their day and remain well-regulated throughout. It is very common for children with sensory processing differences to have difficulty “winding down,” falling asleep, or staying asleep for the duration of the night. Below are some suggestions to support good sleep hygiene and improve regulation throughout the day. In addition to these suggestions, it is important to discuss with your child the purpose and need for quality sleep to help with overall health wellness.

Throughout the day:

- Ensure that your child receives adequate heavy work at regular intervals throughout his/her day.
- Complete other sensory diet activities consistently, as prescribed by your therapist.
- Cease all active play 60-90 minutes directly prior to bedtime.
- Consider your child's diet. For example, high protein meals, and reduction in sugar intake can support improved sleep for some. Discuss your child's diet/nutrition needs with their pediatrician before making any changes.

Activities to incorporate into nighttime routine:

- Allow your child to be a part of establishing the night time routine. Consider using a picture schedule, checklist, or other visual to keep the routine consistent after it is established. Begin the night time routine at the same time each night.
- A warm bath. If this is a part of your child's night time routine, consider making environmental changes while they are in the bathroom, such that when they come out the lighting is dim, electronics are off
- Consider adding a snack/warm drink to your child's nighttime routine. Avoid snack foods that are very spicy, sour, or crunchy.
- Pillow Squishes
- Nighttime massage (consider lotion with a calming scent, such as lavender or chamomile)
- Progressive muscle relaxation (this can be done with a recording, or script)
- A relaxation story

Environmental considerations

- Try to avoid electronics 30-60 minutes prior to sleep
- Decrease lighting at the start of the night time routine
- Offer a cool sleeping temperature, with the opportunity for neutral warmth from a blanket
- Some children may be calmed by placing an article of a parent's clothing inside the child's bed during the night.
- Provide the child with firm, deep pressure to her body to help calm. Offer firm pressure or a “squeeze” to her back or limbs.
- Consider a weighted blanket, or heavy-weight quilt (about 10% of child's weight)
- Hug a body pillow in bed. Some children may prefer to be surrounded by heavy pillows or large stuffed animals.
- Background noise (white noise machine, sound machine app, fan, tranquil music) or play soft, calm music with a repetitive rhythm.
- Consider a colored alarm clock that indicates when the child can exit their bed/room in the morning. Provide alternative activities they can try if they do wake up before the alarm turns green.

- Essential oils, presented through a diffuser, may offer a calming environment. Scents such as lavender, chamomile, vetiver, or ylang ylang may be suitable.
- Ensure your child has a very consistent bedtime routine each night