

# Marijana's Top Tips for Establishing An Effective Bedtime Routine



Sleep seems to be a difficult topic for many families either because children find it hard to unwind and fall asleep at an appropriate time, or because they wake up frequently in the night. Reasons behind these behaviours could be numerous, but often they can be remedied by improving your child's sleep hygiene.

**Sleep hygiene** refers to healthy sleep habits – all the things that we need to do to give ourselves a chance of having a good night sleep. First thing to consider when thinking about sleep hygiene is your child's **sleep need**. Every child's sleep need vary based on their age, cultural differences, and genetics. Recommendations that are easily available on the Internet telling you how much a child of a certain age should sleep should be used as guidelines only as they don't consider a combination of characteristics specific just to your child: their temperament, character, genetics, culture and similar. So, don't become alarmed if your child sleeps more or less than the "recommended" amount. The key is to monitor children's behaviour during daytime: if they generally seem content and happy, likelihood is they are getting enough sleep. If not, before you start changing their bedtimes, be mindful of potential other causes for your child's daytime moods.

Good sleep hygiene starts at daytime and is then carried on into the evening. This means that we need to be mindful of all the things that children do or don't do in the day and reflect on how much those things impact our children's sleep hygiene. Use the following to reflect on your child's current sleep hygiene:

- Has my child had enough exercise today?  
*Current recommendation is that children need at least 60 active minutes a day to feel good and sleep well.*
- Has my child had enough daylight?  
*This is important as sunlight helps regulate our sleeping patterns and can even help with early risers.*
- Has my child been spending too much time on screens?  
*Although science is still developing on this, general advice is that children shouldn't be exposed to screens at least two hours before bedtime.*



- **Has my child eaten nutritious food?**

*Although the link between sleep and nutrition is not that direct, especially in older children, the basic fact remains - if children are hungry, they are more likely to have problems with falling asleep, staying asleep and waking up early. Furthermore, micronutrient deficiency can have a detrimental effect on sleep. For example, anaemia and Vitamin D deficiency can cause insomnia, problems with falling asleep and the quality of sleep. Finally, food allergies and intolerances can cause digestive problems which are likely to have a negative impact on sleep.*

### **Establishing a simple and soothing evening/bedtime routine**

Children should go to bed at regular time; their bedtime routine should start 20-30 minutes before that time. The purpose of bedtime routine is to calm and sooth the child and get them into the “sleep” mode by giving them “**sleep ques**”: toys are put away, lights are dimmed, your tone of voice is calm, low and soothing, there is a general feeling of snuggling together and children know what to expect.

Some children find it helpful to have a **Bedtime routine chart** – this is a visual reminder of the tasks that they need to do before they go to bed. You can create it with your child, they can decorate it and then use it consistently. When it is time to start their bedtime routine, you ask the child: “*What is the first thing on your routine chart?*” and then encourage them to complete all the activities on there.

Some children respond better if you insert some fun into their bedtime routine, for example if you play music while they brush their teeth.

### **When to see a doctor**

Of course, not all sleep issues can be solved with a good sleep hygiene. See your child’s doctor if you notice any of the following: mouth breathing, snoring or pauses in breathing, your child making strange movements in the night, poor weight gain or weight loss, night sweats and prolonged illness.

### **REMEMBER!**

*When practicing sleep hygiene, consistency is the key. This is because sleep strategies need time to work and be effective. Finally, due to children’s individual differences, not all sleep hygiene suggestions will work well for all children, making “trial and error” approach a reality for many parents. Sadly, there are no quick fixes that work for everybody – the trick is to be flexible and find what works for your child.*



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is the key.**

**MOVE**  
  
**MORE**  
EVERY CHILD ACTIVE