

## Young children with Cerebral Palsy need a good night's sleep!

Sleep is essential for good health and well being.

Children need good sleep for:

- growth and development
- general health
- energy for daily activities
- mood and well being
- social and family interaction
- memory and learning
- attention and concentration

Research has shown that children need varying amounts of sleep depending on age\*.

Newborn = 16hrs	3 - 5yrs = 11hrs
3 - 5mths = 14hrs	5 - 9yrs = 10.5hrs
6 - 23mths = 13hrs	10 - 13yrs = 10hrs
2 - 3years = 12hrs	*Durand, 1998

**Did you know?**  
If children can settle to sleep in their own bed, they are much more likely to be able to re-settle independently when they wake during the night.



Sleep disturbance is common in people with CP and their families

Children with CP may have:

- pain and discomfort due to muscle spasm, abnormal postures, pressure, temperature/perspiration, reflux, intestinal problems and breathing difficulties
- behavioural and learning difficulties related to intellectual disability, autism, ADHD, epilepsy, sensory impairment and health issues
- difficulty managing their sleep environment such as adjusting bedding, lights or music or changing position in bed

Help is available to assist children and their families with sleep difficulties.

Solutions may be complex, but can include:

- equipment for positioning • use of special beds and bedding • medication
- specialist intervention ( eg speech pathologist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, dietician, orthopaedic surgeon, neurologist, respiratory physician, socialwork, psychologist, nurse, dentist and GP)

The 'Sleep Solutions Team' at The Centre for Cerebral Palsy can help to bring these solutions together ... for a good night's sleep for you and your family.

# Sleep Solutions for babies and children with Cerebral Palsy

## Routine



A calming routine prior to bed allows time for your child to relax and prepare for sleep. Too much activity in the last hour before bedtime can lead to over stimulation and difficulty with initiating sleep. Television, computer, boisterous play or exercise and heavy meals should be avoided in this time. The routine needs to be consistent each day and may include a set time for: outside play, dinner, bath, story, teeth, toilet, bed, and wake-up time. Every family's routine is different – think about what time you all need to be up in the morning and this can help you work out the timing of the evening / sleep routines (refer to recommended sleep times over the page for your child's age range). Your therapy team can help to find ways of ensuring that the cues for bedtime routine suit your child's language, sensory and behavioural needs.

## Daytime Sleeps



Children who are over-tired have trouble getting to sleep. Daytime sleeps are important for young children. Look at the timing and duration of naps to see if they are having an impact on night sleeps. Use of a day/night diary can be useful for this.

## Food & Drink



A healthy diet full of fresh fruit, vegetables, complex carbohydrates and protein will assist with your child's ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. There is research suggesting that some foods and food additives can have an effect on children that makes it difficult for them to settle. Caffeine in food and drinks should be avoided from midday onwards. Some children with cerebral palsy have difficulty with feeding and drinking which can affect their sleep – they may be hungry, thirsty or have digestive problems. It may be useful for you to talk to your child's therapy team and/or GP about this.

## Sunlight Exposure



Time spent outside with exposure to sunlight is essential for regulation of our internal body clock and our sleep/wake cycle. If your child is having problems falling asleep at night and then sleeping in too long in the morning, time outdoors at the start of each day may help.

## Physical Exercise



Encouraging moderate intensity physical exercise or play each day will help your child sleep at night time. Boisterous activities should be avoided close to bedtime as this may extend the time it takes to fall asleep.

## Postural Management



Pain, pressure, posture, surgery and muscle spasm may have an impact on your child's ability to sleep. Solutions can include supporting your child's posture with night time positioning equipment, using specialist beds and bedding and referral to medical specialists to investigate use of medications or other interventions such as surgery and botox injections.

## Bedroom Environment



Look at your child's bedroom and bedding. Think about ways to make the bedroom a calming place. Consider temperature, comfort, light and noise. Decrease distractions in the bedroom – remove televisions and computers and store toys out of sight.

## General Health



General health will impact on your child's ability to get to sleep and stay asleep. Allergies, colds, reflux and medications may all play a role and need to be addressed individually. Talk to your child's GP or medical specialist about your child's health and medications.