

Promoting Healthy Habits

Habits are developed whether we intend for them to be or not, and bad habits are formed just as easily as good ones, if not more so. Starting early, as soon as your child is born, can allow your child to develop healthy habits. These in turn increase the likelihood that your child will continue these good practices into adulthood and go on to live a healthy life.

Sleep



Sleep is important for the mental and physical wellbeing of growing children. It's also important for parents who often find time to meet their own needs and recharge while their children are asleep. Sleep is a very active time for children, although it's when they are quietest. During sleep, they consolidate and retain information learned while they are awake and their bodies rest as well. During sleep, the body's energy is restored, tissues grow and those that are damaged or worn are repaired, important hormones that influence brain development are released.

The amount of sleep that children need varies according to their age and stage of development. The chart below gives an idea of how much sleep your child needs:

Newborns 0 - 1 months	16 hours
Toddlers 1 - 2 years	11 - 14 hours
Pre-schooler 3 - 5 years	10 - 13 hours

This can vary from child to child, and some children may need an hour or two more or less than others in their age group.

Parents can ensure that a child gets adequate rest by establishing a routine. It does not have to be down to the last second, but having a set bedtime and a set time to wake every morning is a healthy habit that should start in childhood. It can be a challenge to maintain this when a child is school-age and on

vacation from school, but make the effort to stick to a routine wherever possible. It will allow the child the re-integrate into the school routine more easily.

Having a designated place for sleep is also important, and ensuring that stimulating and distracting toys and devices are not allowed in this area or after a certain time is important. If a bedtime story is a part of the routine, then once that story is read, reducing light, noise, conversation etc. sets the tone that it's time to sleep. A healthy diet and regular exercise are also important for healthy sleep.

