

Sleep Solutions for Kids with ADHD

Help your child fall asleep faster,
get a good night's rest,
and wake up on time.



From the ADHD Experts at

ADDITUDE

Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

ADDITUDE

Strategies and Support *for* ADHD & LD

A trusted source of advice and information for families touched by attention-deficit disorder—
and a voice of inspiration to help people with ADHD find success at home, at school, and on the job.

ADDitudeMag.com

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Introduction

Children and adults with ADHD don't get enough sleep. Restless brains keep them awake too late; or fitful sleep prevents them from feeling well rested; or they just don't want to miss any of the action—whatever the reason, people with ADHD are three times more likely to have trouble falling and staying asleep. And that lack of replenishing rest can have serious health consequences.

According to research, inadequate sleep can lead to a host of health problems including obesity, diabetes, immune problems, and cardiovascular disease. What's more, problem sleepers and children who are hyperactive at night are much more likely to have ADHD. One study of more than 2,000 babies between the ages of six of 12 months found that none of the good, consistent sleepers were later diagnosed with ADHD. The consequences for parents are severe as well.

On average, most parents of children with ADHD sleep less than six hours a night. And even that time is interrupted with as many as four nighttime wakings—even among older kids. All of this makes it tough to log any quality REM. So how do you keep your family from turning into one big sleep-deprived basket case? In this guide, we explain why kids with ADHD sleep less, how parents can help change that, and what products can make a difference. Make this your bedtime reading tonight!

Sincerely,
The *ADDitude* Editors

**Sleep Solutions
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from the editors of

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Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

Sleep Solutions for Kids with ADHD

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Chapter 1

Common Sleep Problems and Why They Occur

Children with ADHD wake up too early, struggle nightly to fall asleep, and/or are unable to rouse themselves in the morning. Sleep is exhausting; not restorative. And when kids don't sleep, it affects all areas of their lives—appetite, stress, energy, motivation, focus, learning, and the ability to regulate emotions. Bad sleep throws everything out of whack, including their tired parents.

- 1. Initiation Insomnia:** Kids either can't get their minds to slow down in order to fall asleep, or they have a burst of energy right before bedtime. They might feel drowsy throughout the day, but suddenly click on once they are in bed. Restless thoughts can bounce from one thing to another, keeping them from relaxing and falling asleep.
- 2. Restless Sleep:** Kids toss and turn all night, or wake up at the smallest noise. They have trouble maintaining a consistent level of sleep. You will often find them tangled in their sheets, or sprawled out with the covers kicked onto the floor. This kind of sleep is not refreshing, and children often will feel just as tired when they wake up as they did when they went to sleep.
- 3. Difficulty Waking:** After sleeping fitfully until the early hours, kids with ADHD may fall into a very deep sleep, and have a hard time getting out of bed. They are often irritable or combative when woken, and might not feel alert for a good part of the morning.
- 4. Intrusive Sleep:** When kids are forced to do a task that doesn't interest them, their nervous systems disengage in search of more interesting activities. Sometimes this disengagement can be so sudden that it brings on extreme drowsiness, akin to feeling like a zombie, or even sudden sleep. This type of troubled sleeper will have problems staying alert throughout the day.

Sleep disorders are very common in kids with ADHD. Narcolepsy, sleepwalking, sleep talking, teeth grinding, restless legs syndrome, and in particular, a

“I’m starting to worry that I’ll have to wake up my daughter for the rest of her life!”

—DIANE

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sleep disorder known as sleep apnea are all common complaints. Sleep apnea occurs when a child is not breathing for a period of time, which is called an apnea, or oxygen levels are desaturated because of infrequent breathing that can result in heavy snoring.

There are biological, behavioral, and psychological factors at work here. Biologically, many of the regions of the brain that regulate attention also regulate sleep. In other words, the neurological chemistry in children with ADHD makes it tough for them to sleep. There are two main chemical messenger systems in the brain: the dopamine systems, and the serotonin systems. Serotonin regulation is implicated in sleep and in paying attention. Its dis-regulation impacts both areas of life.

Additionally, children with ADHD tend to experience abnormalities in their circadian rhythms, or sleep patterns. A normal circadian rhythm triggers the body to sleep when the sun goes down at night. It releases melatonin, a brain chemical, which encourages the body to sleep. People with ADHD have a weak signal on their internal circadian clock. As a result, their bodies may not release melatonin at typical times, and they don't naturally feel sleepy or awake in sync with the sun's setting and rising. This faulty signaling could also contribute to challenges keeping track of time and schedules for individuals with ADHD.

Children with ADHD have trouble entering rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. REM is the period of sleep that helps you feel restored and refreshed, and is important for memory consolidation. If they don't enter that phase, kids will never feel bright eyed and bushy tailed—no matter how much sleep they get. There is evidence that a gene called catechol-O-methyltransferase, or COMT, inactivates dopamine and is highly associated with ADHD. Having the right amount of dopamine helps regulate sleep, and COMT makes that difficult.

Behaviorally, caffeine consumption, a comfortable bed, and the right sleeping environment can all impact how well a child is able to fall asleep.

In some cases, stimulant medications taken too close to bed time can keep children awake. This is not always the case; for some kids, medication can help facilitate sleep. Working with your child's physician to adjust either the dosage, or the time of day the medication is administered, can help.

Psychologically, some children have high levels of anxiety, or worries make them feel agitated and unable to fall asleep. Another culprit is lack of a bedtime routine.

“One hypothesis is that the lack of an accurate circadian clock may also account for the difficulty that many with ADHD have in judging the passage of time.”—DR. WILLIAM DODSON

“Sometimes I wake up to all the clothes in her drawers sorted and organized, blankets and sheets off the bed and she is asleep under her desk. Whatever it takes!”—STACEY

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Chapter 2

Sleep Remedies—Strategies for Parents

Sleep deprivation makes both adults and kids irritable, impatient, and less efficient at everything they do. Not getting enough rest can worsen ADHD symptoms, and lead to a loss of emotional control and decreased working memory. Think of these strategies as your bedtime toolbox.

- 1. Talk to Your Doctor:** Keep a daily log of when your child falls asleep and when he wakes, and share his sleep patterns with your doctor. Ask if there is anything you can do to better help your child fall asleep at night, and/or whether a sleep evaluation might be necessary.
- 2. Avoid Sleeping Pills:** Many medications that work well for adults are not screened for safety or effectiveness in children. Some doctors may prescribe clonidine for kids who have trouble falling asleep. It may help them fall asleep faster, but they may still wake up in the middle of the night. Lifestyle changes can be more effective than medication for some children.
- 3. Establish a Routine:** The best way to avoid sleep problems is to have a set bedtime, and make the experience pleasurable. Research shows that children with regular bedtime routines get to sleep sooner and wake less often during the night. Some children with ADHD need less sleep than others. You want to make sure that bedtime isn't so early that kids spend a long time lying awake, feeling anxious. Whatever bedtime you establish, make sure to enforce it on weekends and during the week. Staying up late on Friday and Saturday can disrupt the body's natural rhythms and make Monday feel like jet lag.
- 4. Help Motivate Kids to Want to Go to Bed:** Help your child understand what she has to gain by going to bed at a reasonable time. Let her be a part of the bedtime strategies you are establishing by talking about what she likes about bedtime, and how she feels when she's well rested. Sleep is hard for them. Letting them know you're going

“What works best, (which doesn’t mean it works consistently) is trying to keep a sleep routine, including preventing him from sleeping in on week-ends.” — MLULU

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to help them—rather than making their lack of sleep seem like a problem you need to fix—helps kids engage in the process.

- 5. Ban Screen Time Before Bed:** Make bedtime a relaxing routine. Sleep can become frustrating for kids with ADHD. Parents need to give them ways to be flexible and feel calm while they are waiting to fall asleep. Nighttime rituals can send signals to the brain that it's time to slow down and shut off. In the hours leading up to bedtime, do calm and relaxing activities like reading or listening to calming music. A foot or back rub can relax a restless child. A pleasing activity—like reading a book or playing a quiet board game—can help kids look forward to bedtime instead of dreading it. Violent television and video games should be off limits along with roughhousing with sibling.
- 6. Try Meditation:** Deep breathing along with a visualization exercise can help kids who have bedtime separation anxiety. Have kids focus on breathing while visualizing an elevator gently ascending with every inhalation and exhalation. Or teach children progressive muscle relaxation by tightening and tensing certain muscle groups for 7-10 seconds, and then releasing to help them fall asleep.

“Several studies show that rhythmic, paced breathing balances the autonomic nervous system,” says Richard Brown, M.D., associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. What does that mean for your child? Simple—learning to control her breathing can help her relax before sleep.

Many of Brown's patients have benefited from something called “coherent breathing”—a term coined by yoga specialist and author Stephen Elliott because the techniques synchronizes the heart, lungs, and brain. One benefit of coherent breathing, says Brown, is that it's portable and always accessible.

To teach your child coherent breathing techniques, you should learn them yourself first. Begin by finding a quiet place to sit where you won't be interrupted. Close your eyes, relax your eyes, neck, hands, and feet, and complete five or six full breaths in a minute, keeping your awareness on the breath moving inside of you. Once you're confident in your own ability to keep the pace, get your child involved.

One note: Practice coherent breathing with your child when you're both calm. A lot of people say, “Oh, I'll do it when I get stressed.” “That's like waiting to brush your teeth after they've fallen out,” says Brown.

- 7. Choose the Right Sleep Attire:** Wearing socks can help kids with chilly feet fall asleep. Removing scratchy tags can eliminate irritation.

Learn more about how mindful meditation helps ADHD brains in the ADDitude eBook “Mindfulness & Other Natural Treatments for ADHD”

<http://additu.de/mindfulness>

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Don't pick out flannel pajamas and flannel sheets. The two can stick together and make it tough for kids to move around. If the bedroom is warm, cotton pajamas can help prevent sweating.

- 8. Make Time for a Hot Bath:** A soak in nice, hot water 30 to 60 minutes before bedtime can help relax children—even older kids who don't need a nightly bath. Being in a warm bath, and then cooling off encourages a drop in core body temperature that leads to sleep.
- 9. Don't Allow Nighttime Snacks:** Stop snacking two hours before bedtime. Digestion can keep kids awake, along with hidden caffeine and sugar in foods. If your child is hungry, provide snacks like warm milk, saltines, an apple, or turkey, which contains sleep-inducing tryptophan. Make sure your child is hydrated all day so that too many beverages before bed don't lead to unnecessary bathroom breaks.
- 10. Make Physical Exercise a Habit:** A morning jog, bike ride, or walk can have benefits all day. Physical activity helps our bodies transition between phases of sleep. The physical stress that it places on the body increases the time that a child can spend in deep sleep. Kids who do yoga are less hyperactive. Just make sure it's not too close to bedtime. Being physically active can rev up the body and make it more difficult to fall asleep.
- 11. Try a Sleep Diary:** For a week or two, have kids write in a journal before bed about how they think the night went, what their routine was like, and then how they sleep. It can help figure out what works for them, and what might be behind sleepless nights. Then, you can vary routines accordingly. Or, have kids write down three things they did well that day. It can help put the mind in a positive place for sleep.
- 12. Improve Sleep Hygiene:** Consider all of the things that foster the initiation and maintenance of sleep. These will vary from child to child, but anything that marks a clear division from day to night can help. Some people need silence, while others need white noise. You can help cue your child's body that it's time to go to sleep with darkness. It will eliminate visual distractions, like toys, that can keep him awake. If your child wants a night light, set it on a sleep timer. Use an alarm clock that only lights up when touched, and reduce outside light by putting up blackout curtains.
- 13. End the 'One More Story' Battle:** Make a recording of you reading one of your child's favorite stories. Your child can listen to it after you finish an in-person story, or if he wakes in the middle of the night. It will keep the bedtime ritual consistent, and frees parents to exit the bedroom.

“As the day begins, my students head outside for 20 minutes of T'ai Chi. Returning to the classroom, they're ready to focus, and we immerse ourselves in math.”—TEACHER KAREN SUNDERHAFT

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14. Try Aromatherapy: Certain scents, like lavender, can create a relaxing effect. Experiment with a scented oil or room freshener.

15. Make Time for Self Care: If parents don't take care of themselves well, they can't help kids as well as they want to. Parents will melt down because they are tired, hungry, or haven't exercised. Make sure you're applying the same strategies for kids to make sure you are getting enough rest yourself.

“I turn on multiple small radios around my room tuned to the news stations (stereo effect). They stay on all night because ambient noises help me concentrate on sleeping. If I go to bed and get bored, I listen to the news and learn a lot.”—GARRETT

Chapter 3

Sleep Aids that Work

Routines and exercise help, but sometimes we need additional help. Parents should always consult with a physician before trying a sleep aid or supplement.

1. **Melatonin** is a naturally occurring peptide that is released by the brain in response to the setting of the sun. As a supplement, it can help make up for a faulty circadian clock. Melatonin should be taken about an hour before bed to allow enough time for children's bodies to metabolize it. Dosage can vary based on body weight and metabolism, so consult with a pediatrician before using melatonin. It's generally better to start with a very low dosage. Melatonin may take a few nights to become effective.
2. **GABA**, another natural supplement can help you to unwind and sleep peacefully.
3. **Benadryl**, or the generic diphenhydramine, in a very low dosage can help kids feel drowsy. Just make sure that when they wake up the next morning, kids are not feeling sleepy or lethargic. Make sure your doctor knows you are using this and approves. And keep in mind that Benadryl has the opposite effect on a small percentage of kids — making them wired when you most need them to sleep.
4. The **Twilight Turtle** and other similar nightlights project glowing images around your child's bedroom, which can help distract a troubled sleeper from tossing and turning. Kids can focus on the ceiling as they drift off.
5. Celestial Seasoning **Sleepytime Extra tea** is a great relaxation tool to use an hour before bedtime. A mug with a little honey, and a favorite book, can lull kids to sleep in no time.
6. **Badger Sleep Balm** contains herbs like lavender and rosemary. Rubbing some on your child's temples before bed can help them sleep calmly through the night.

For more ADHD-tested products recommended by our experts, visit <http://additu.de/products>

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7. **The OK to Wake! Owl** with nightlight, music, and a nap timer can work wonders for children who wake up scared or anxious in the middle of the night, or have trouble knowing when it's OK to get out of bed. Parents set the time that they want their kids to wake. If a child wakes up before that time, and presses the owl's button, the face glows yellow and tells her to go back to sleep. When it is time to get up, it glows green and plays happy music.
8. **The Sleep Fairy: Guided Relaxation for Children CD** can help insomniac kids fall asleep, and get back to sleep when they wake in the middle of the night. A well-placed CD player near a child's bed can let them listen to these exercises independently when they're suddenly wide awake at 2 am.
9. **A white noise machine's** gentle whirring can drown out ambient noise, and help kids stay asleep throughout the night without being startled awake by outside sounds. Sound machines similarly play relaxing music or nature sounds that help relax kids.
10. **Body pillows** can help children get cozy in bed with shapes that conform to the way they like to lie.
11. **Sleep Aid apps** can help older kids fall asleep with soothing sounds, white noise, and melodies. Guided-meditation apps can act as a personal relaxation coach to turn off an endless stream of thoughts. Sleep tracking apps can give you reports of how well your child is sleeping to give you insight into what works and what doesn't.
12. The **Dux Air Humidifier Mushroom** comes with a nightlight that can help your child feel safe in the dark, and creates a cold mist that will keep them from becoming too dry or dehydrated during the night.

For a list of our favorite sleep apps, visit <http://additude/139>

Chapter 4

Sample Schedule

Sample Homework Routine

3:00 p.m.	Have a snack and unwind from school.
3:30 p.m.	Settle your child at his regular homework spot; be sure all tools are available (pencils, paper, calculator, reference books, etc.).
3:35–4:30 p.m.	Your child does homework; you stay around to answer questions and monitor breaks (stretch, bathroom, drink).
4:25 p.m.	Check his work, and calmly go over anything he should edit (but don't do it for him). Offer specific praise for good work.

Sample Dinner Routine

5:30 p.m.	Parent(s) begin food prep. Organize preparation so that you can avoid the delay of mealtime.
6:00 p.m.	Kids set the table. Give them specific tasks to instill a sense of responsibility, like pouring the beverages.
6:15 p.m.	Dinner is served. For mealtime talk, try this: Go around the table—once or more—and have each person share one good thing about his or her day.
6:45 p.m.	Kids clear the table. Parent(s) loads the dishwasher.

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Sample Bedtime Routine

8:00 p.m.	Let him relax in the tub. You can read to him or he can read to himself. Beyond cleanliness, a bath can help a child mellow out at day's end.
8:20 p.m.	Three-part routine: dry off, brush teeth, and pee. You don't want to hear, "Mom, I have to go to the bathroom!" five minutes after you say goodnight.
8:30 p.m.	Get into PJs and clean up toys to set a nighttime—not a playtime—scenario.
8:55 p.m.	Your child gets into bed. Do your nighttime routine: Talk a little about the day, compliment your child on the things he did well, say your ritual goodnight - "I love you all the way to the moon and back again. Don't let the bedbugs bite."

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ADDitude Special Reports Available Now

www.adhdreports.com

A Parents Guide to Effective ADHD Discipline

A better-behavior plan for the most oppositional, defiant children

Nothing works. You take away electronics or special activities, and he couldn't care less. You try rewards, points, praise, consequences—nothing turns around his behavior. He shows no remorse, and you feel like a failed parent. Sound familiar? This 25-page ebook, filled with expert tips and solutions is a game-changer.

>> Learn More About This Special Report: <http://additu.de/191>

A Parent's Guide to ADHD Diet and Nutrition

The foods, vitamins, minerals, supplements, and herbs than can help your child

What is the connection between the food your child eats and his or her hyperactivity, impulsivity, and distractibility? The editors of *ADDitude* have curated scientific information about foods and additives to avoid; how omega-3s, iron, and zinc boost the brain; why you should remove foods with artificial dyes and flavors; and much more.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/nutrition>

Video Games and the ADHD Brain

A parent's guide to setting limits, easing transitions, choosing brain-building games, and keeping kids safe online

Is your child addicted to Minecraft? In this ebook, the editors of *ADDitude* present research on hyperfocus and video games, recommend games that build thinking, and offer advice on setting limits your child will honor. Includes frequently asked parent questions answered by gaming expert Randy Kulman, Ph.D.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/minecraft>

FREE ADDitude Downloadable Booklets

4 Parent-Child Therapies for Better Behavior

Many families living with ADHD use behavior therapy and family training programs to break the cycle of bad behavior and defiance.

50 Smart Discipline Tips for Your ADHD Child

The best techniques from parenting experts for dealing with dishonesty, getting your child to take you seriously, and much more!

A Routine That Works for Your ADHD Child

Customize this hour-by-hour routine for your ADHD child—and make your day less stressful.

13 Parenting Strategies for ADHD Kids

What does it take to be a great parent to your ADHD child? Here's what works, and why.

When You Have ADHD Too

18 tips for parents with ADHD—advice on balancing career, housework, and childcare when you share a diagnosis.

Homework Help for ADHD Children

Addressing homework problems is critical—here's how to do it.

You Know Your Child Has ADHD When...

Parents of ADHD children on the funny side to living with ADHD symptoms.

Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at:

[http://additu.de/
freedownloads](http://additu.de/freedownloads)

FREE ADHD Webinar Replays from ADDitude:

Sleep Solutions for ADHD Kids

>> <http://www.additudemag.com/RCLP/sub/10676.html>

Getting a good night's sleep can be a major challenge for ADHD families—one that can make ADHD symptoms worse, and leave everyone feeling cranky. Lisa Shives, M.D., and Elaine Taylor-Klaus, CPCC, PCC explain how to create good bedtime habits for children so your family can log the shut eye you all need.

Why ADHDers Can't Sleep—and What You Can Do About It

>> <http://www.additudemag.com/RCLP/sub/11047.html>

Emotionally intense: that's what ADHD kids and parents are, and it takes some finesse to manage it. Experts Elaine Taylor-Klaus and Diane Dempster offer strategies to keep those turbulent emotions in proportion, and prevent your child's anger from getting out of control.

Why Does He Do That?

>> <http://additu.de/barkley>

How does attention deficit disorder affect your child's behavior and development? Russell Barkley, Ph.D., explains, and offers insightful tips on providing structure, consequences, and rewards.

The Calm Parent

>> <http://additu.de/3m>

Parents of ADHD children with challenging behavior may be locked in a cycle of defiance, disrespect, bullying, sibling fights, meltdowns, and power struggles. Kirk Martin, founder of Celebrate Calm, explains how to stop that cycle. Learn how to keep your cool when your ADHD child acts up.

Emotions in Teens and AdWults with ADHD

>> <http://additu.de/teens>

Dr. Thomas E. Brown joins us to share strategies for achieving and maintaining emotional control, as well as advice for teaching teens to find emotional balance in the face of emotional flooding and executive function deficits.

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Adult ADHD and LD (weekly)

Expert advice on managing your household, time, money, career, and relationships

Parenting ADHD and LD Children (weekly)

Strategies and support for parents on behavior and discipline, time management, disorganization, and making friends.

ADHD and LD at School (bimonthly; weekly from August through October)

How to get classroom accommodations, finish homework, work with teachers, find the right schools, and much more.

Treating ADHD (weekly)

Treatment options for attention deficit including medications, food, supplements, brain training, mindfulness and other alternative therapies.