

*is
your
kid
having
a*

sleep crisis?

You would never send your child to school without her lunch box, but **millions of kids start each day without enough z's**—and that could be hurting their chances in the classroom



BY JULIA SAVACOOOL PHOTOGRAPHS BY GRANT CORNETT
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As a sleep pro, Kristin Avis, Ph.D., knows the havoc insufficient shut-eye can wreak on a kid's life. "I treated one preschooler who'd become so hyper in class, he'd just been asked to leave his third preschool," says Dr. Avis, associate director of the Pediatric Sleep Disorders Center at Children's of Alabama hospital in Birmingham. The child's behavior was so awful his teacher suspected ADHD, but his pediatrician thought otherwise and sent the boy Dr. Avis's

way instead. "The poor kid wasn't getting enough sleep—he was missing naps and he had an inconsistent bedtime schedule," she recalls. So Dr. Avis set up some guidelines, including regular nap- and bedtimes. "After a few weeks, he was the most delightful child."

That preschooler is far from alone: Children in the United States are more sleep-deprived than anywhere else in the world—with 70 to 80 percent of school-age »»→





kids falling short of experts' recommendations, according to researchers at Boston College. (See "How Many Z's Do Kids Need?" opposite.)

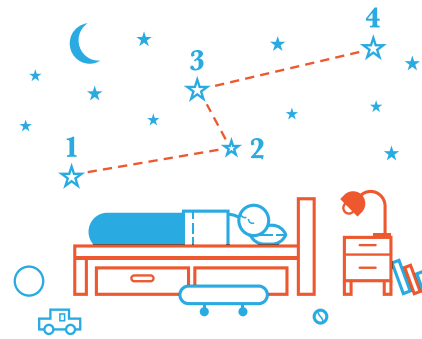
The reasons for the sleep shortfall are many: Not only are there more high-tech, light-emitting gadgets luring kids away from slumberland, but thanks to longer workdays, families are struggling more than ever to find time to spend together during the week. No wonder sleep gets such short shrift.

Unfortunately, it doesn't take many bad nights to derail your kid. "Losing just 30 minutes of sleep a night can have a measurable impact on a child's well-being," notes Lisa Meltzer, Ph.D., a sleep specialist and associate professor of pediatrics at National Jewish Health, a hospital in Denver. The fallout includes poor grades as well as a spike in anxiety and hyperactivity. (See "Your Kid on Too-Little Sleep," opposite.)

Inconsistent bedtimes are equally problematic. Kids who had irregular bedtimes as toddlers scored worse on cognitive tests at age 7 than children who kept to a regular schedule most nights, reports a new study in the *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*. That's because unpredictable snoozing times confuse the body's internal clock, making it tougher to fall asleep and stay that way.

Luckily, all such negative effects are reversible—with a little effort and patience on your part. We went to top sleep experts to bring you a plan that will help your child drift off drama-free (almost) every night.

Get ready: Your guide to better nights starts here!



4 steps to dreamland

Most young sleepyheads could use a few tricks to get into a better nighttime groove. Try these:

1. create a routine If your kiddo's lights-out rituals have gone the way of his footie pjs, it's time to dust them off; a routine helps kids wind down, putting them in the mood to snooze. Make sure you save a few minutes to snuggle together over a story (even if your child is reading on his own): "Books at bedtime help kids sleep much better," says Dr. Avis.

2. remove tech temptations The blue light emitted from devices like computers, smartphones, and TVs can disrupt the body's ability to drift off. (True for kids and grown-ups alike.) So shut off electronics at least an hour before it's time to hit the sack.

To curb your tween's tendency to sneak in another round of texting once you leave the room, have her hand over her devices to you for safekeeping, says Rachel Moon, M.D., author of *Sleep: What Every Parent Needs to Know*.

If your child has a television in her room (and nearly half of school-age kids do), remove it. Not only will

the screen light increase arousal, interrupting your child's sleep cycle, but the content may as well—especially if you're not around to monitor it.

3. skip the sugar Unless you want to give your child an adrenaline rush at exactly the wrong time, cut out nighttime sweets. If your kid craves a snack before bedtime, try a protein-rich food (a small cup of low-sugar yogurt or a cheese stick are both good options). That will help keep her feeling full longer, which in turn will speed up the arrival of the sandman.

4. create a cozy cave Dim, cool spaces help a kid drift off: "The darkness allows your child to tap into his natural circadian rhythms," says Dr. Moon. (Darkness tells your body to produce more melatonin, a hormone that makes you sleepy.) As your child gets into his jammies, lower the lights and crack open a window. If he is afraid of the dark, leave the door slightly open or plug in a night-light.

TIP:

Avoid using the bedroom as the timeout place. Instead of seeing it as a happy space, your kid may associate it with negative feelings, which can interfere with drifting off.

how many z's do kids need?

Guidelines from the National Sleep Foundation

2- to 3-year-olds

12 to 14 hours of sleep in a 24-hour period (including naps)

3- to 5-year-olds

11 to 13 hours a night

5- to 10-year-olds

10 to 11 hours a night

105

The number of extra calories toddlers consume per day when they sleep fewer than 10 hours a night.

Source: University College London

TIP:

get set for class

Summer break messes up most kids' sleep schedules. **Reset your little one's body clock** now so he's used to hitting the hay earlier by the time school starts. **Here's how:** Over a two- to three-week period, move your child's bedtime back by 10 to 15 minutes each night (for example, from 8:30 to 8:20 and so on) until you reach the magic number.

your kid on too-little sleep

If your child can't get out of bed within 15 minutes of waking up or dozes more than an hour past his school-day wake-up time on weekends, he's not getting enough time in slumberland. The consequences:



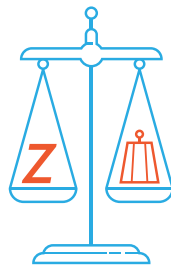
major melt-downs

"In little kids, you get tantrum after tantrum after tantrum," says Dr. Moon. In tweens, moodiness is a major side effect of getting too few hours of sleep.



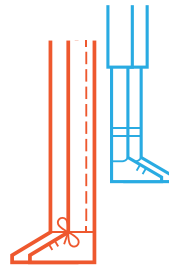
a dive in learning

Researchers studied 2,400 school kids and discovered that when children fall short by just one hour of shut-eye for five nights in a row, they have trouble focusing on lessons in the classroom.



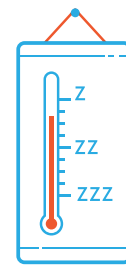
weight gain

Children who slumber fewer than 10½ hours a night at age 3 are 45 percent more likely to become obese by age 7, according to a study in the *British Medical Journal*. The reason: Sleep deprivation can cause a spike in the hormone ghrelin, which triggers feelings of hunger.



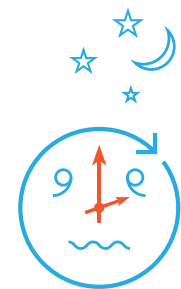
low-quality relationships

An overtired child can be hyper or surly, or simply tuned out. In time, that attitude will become tough to take—for parents, teachers, and classmates, says Dr. Avis.



extra sick days

"In adults, research shows that too little sleep weakens the immune system," says Dr. Meltzer. "That's likely true in kids as well." Translation: Not enough snoozing puts your child at higher risk for colds, flu, and other nasty bugs.



a vicious cycle

Kids who stay up late get wired instead of tired. When they finally go to bed, they're too jittery to nod off, setting them up for more bad nights ahead, says Dr. Moon.

outsmart common snooze stealers



nightmares

▶ to soothe a child's fears

Your best strategy is to stay calm; your kid will take his cue from your emotions. If a nightmare wakes him up, refrain from switching on the lights or ruminating together over the dream. "Your goal is to get your child back to sleep quickly, so simply tell him, 'It's okay, Mom's here, there's nothing to be afraid of,'" says Michele Borba, Ed.D., author of *12 Simple Secrets Real Moms Know*.

In the morning, the two of you can discuss the dream. Let your child know you take his worries seriously, says Dr. Borba, but try not to make too big a deal over them.

neediness

▶ to sleep-train a grade-schooler who still wants you to sit beside her

"Have her stay in bed while you run 'errands'—checking on the laundry, cleaning up the kitchen. Each time, gradually extend the length of your absence, from two minutes to three to five," says Dr. Avis. Yes, it takes patience, but think of it as a short-term investment for major long-term benefits.

Another tactic: Give your child a couple of tokens from an old board game and tell her she can use them during the night if she really needs a quick hug or some soothing words from you or her dad, suggests Dr. Borba. Collect a chip when she comes to find you. Just let her know that once she uses both up, no more visits. The strategy will help your child feel like she has some control over whether she sees you or not, Dr. Borba explains.

a spinning mind

▶ to ease a worrier to sleep

After you've read stories, snuggle. Have him relax by thinking about the nice things that happened during the day or by picturing an image of a place he loves. Then be off.

Check in every 10 to 15 minutes at first but stay in the doorway, says Deborah Pedrick, founder of the Family Sleep Institute in Stamford, CT. That way, you aren't setting a precedent that you'll come talk to him every time he can't sleep (or you may end up encouraging the behavior!). "Do not suggest he get out of bed, leave his room, or do any other activity—including reading," Pedrick adds.

nighttime battles

▶ to make it easier to get tweens to bed

It's true that controlling a tween's sleep schedule is a bit harder than a little kid's, but the protocol for bedtime should be like any other house rule: nonnegotiable. Call a family meeting to hash out a routine that works, says Pedrick.

Because your child can now understand the consequences of her actions, open the convo with a discussion of how her behavior is

If your child can't doze off without you by her side, invent some errands. Check the dryer (or, better still, sneak a peek at your newsfeed). Keep extending the time you're gone until she can fall asleep on her own.

affecting you and your partner. Explain that in order to have energy for fun activities during the weekend, everyone needs to rest up during the week.

Then set your rules. Besides shutting off electronics, you can expect a 10-year-old to put away toys or books, brush her teeth, and put on her pajamas. You may endure a few meltdowns on your way to implementation, but if you are consistent, your kid will eventually come around. ■

