

ADHD and Sleep

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Children with ADHD are more likely to have sleep difficulties. However, good sleep hygiene in conjunction with self-soothing relaxation techniques may help to solve his sleep problems.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a neurological condition that is characterized by inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. There are three subtypes of ADHD that are generally recognized by professionals. There is the predominately hyperactive-impulsive type (children don't show significant inattention); the predominately inattentive type (the child does not show significant hyperactive-impulsive behavior)—previously called ADD, and the combined type (a child who displays both inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive behavior.) Research is finding that there is a strong genetic component.

Health problems and inadequate sleep must be taken into account when getting an assessment.

ADHD is not the only disorder that is characterized by attention problems, poor impulse control and hyperactivity. Those characteristics are also likely to be displayed by children who are anxious or depressed, have a sugar sensitivity, or are sleep deprived. In the July/August 2003 issue of *Psychology Today*, a Brown University study suggests, "sleep deprivation in normal children can lead to symptoms of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)." Researchers found that several days of sleep deprivation resulted in the development of ADHD symptoms, and that children's hyperactivity levels escalated with each additional night of poor sleep. The sleep deprivation may be due to sleep apnea, allergies, asthma, circadian rhythm disorder or restless legs syndrome. Not only are children at serious risk of being misdiagnosed as ADHD, if their sleep or health problem remains undetected, their health can be jeopardized.

Research shows a clear link between sleep and school performance but many teachers and schools are slow to get the message. Teachers are often unaware that a lack of sleep is what keeps many of their students from being able to concentrate at school during the day, jumping to the conclusion that a child has a learning problem or ADHD—when the real culprit may very well be insufficient sleep. Federal law mandates that special education students have IEPs (individualized educational plans). As a former special education teacher, I have taken part in countless IEP meetings and can tell you that the subject of sleep deprivation is generally overlooked by school psychologists who fail to take it into account when making their assessments.

Sleep problems associated with ADHD:

- Difficulty relaxing and falling asleep
- Restless legs syndrome (RLS)
- Sensory processing deficits (may be overly sensitive to stimulation, sounds, light, clothing blankets)
- Motor Restlessness
- Night awakenings
- Bedwetting
- Snoring
- Sleep apnea

How you can help:

If your child has ADHD, good sleep hygiene in conjunction with self-soothing relaxation techniques may be all that is needed to solve his sleep difficulties. Children diagnosed with ADHD usually respond particularly well to relaxation techniques, such as those presented in *The Floppy Sleep Game Book*. It is very beneficial for a hyperactive child to practice relaxation techniques at least twice a day. Adequate exercise during the day is also very important. If you suspect that medication is interfering with your child's sleep, meet with your physician to discuss adjusting it. Be aware that stimulant medications such as Cylert, Ritalin, Dexedrine and Adderall may make it difficult for a child to fall asleep at night, especially if they're taken in the late afternoon.

Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at www.pattiteel.com. You can listen to her online radio show at www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com.