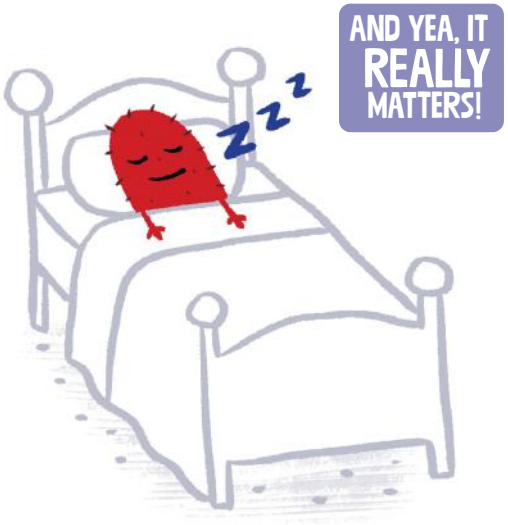
FAMILY EDUCATION SHEET:

Healthy Sleep for Kids and Teens with Chronic Pain



Is it common to have a hard time sleeping?

It's **SUPER** common for people with pain to have difficulty sleeping. The big problem is that when people don't get enough sleep, they become more sensitive to pain and are more likely to have pain problems that stick around.

Clearly, that is **NOT** the outcome you're hoping for, so working on healthy sleep habits is a really important part of feeling better. The good news is that sleep can be improved with changes to your sleep schedule and some behavioral strategies.

Read on to check out some proven ways to help you get better sleep! It turns out they work **MUCH** better if they are practiced the same way every day and night. Keep in mind that this may take some patience: it can take 2-3 weeks of practicing new habits before you notice improvements.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Kids aged 6-12 need 9-12 hours of sleep a night.
- Teenagers aged 13-18 need 8 to 10 hours.

Why am I not getting enough sleep?

Great question! There are many reasons why it's tough. Pain might be one (probably obvious) reason - more than half of young people with chronic pain report difficulties with quantity or quality of sleep! Some teenagers may have a "natural delay in nighttime sleepiness" so it may take longer to feel tired and fall asleep.

Other things that can make it hard to get a full night of healthy sleep are:

Stress! • Busy schedules • Nighttime worries or low mood • Not following a daily routine • Ummm...screens

What is sleep quality?

If you are getting enough hours of sleep, but still feel tired during the day, you may have poor sleep quality. This means that you may be waking up a lot (even if you don't realize it) or have other interruptions to your sleep.

Some signs that your sleep quality isn't great:

- **You cannot make it through the day without a nap**
- **You feel tired a lot**
- **You often feel moody, cranky, or upset**
- **You feel less in control of your actions**
- **You have trouble concentrating or remembering things.**





Am I sleeping too much?

It's possible to have **too much of a good thing**. You may be sleeping too much if you are sleeping more than 12 hours at night or you take naps during the day.

Sometimes people sleep too much to manage chronic pain, but other reasons can include not getting enough physical activity and feelings of sadness and depression. It's possible that too much sleep can hurt your overall sleep quality, making both pain and sleep worse.



Why should I turn off electronics before bedtime?

We know it's tough to hear, but the research is super clear: **electronic devices (phones, TVs, computers, video games, etc.) before bed can make it hard to wind down**. One reason? Blue light from the bright screens can slow down the release of a hormone called melatonin in your body. Melatonin plays a very important role in sleep, so when it's messed up, it is harder to sleep.

Also, the temptation of social media and video games can make it really hard to disconnect from your phone or computer. When that happens, you are very likely to go to sleep a lot later than you intended. **It is important to turn off all electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime.**



What about taking a nap?

Though very tempting, naps can be tricky! **Naps longer than 30 minutes can make it hard to sleep at night and negatively impact sleep quality**. Also, taking a nap too late in the afternoon (like after 1pm) can make it harder to fall asleep at night.

Fun fact: Your body goes into deep sleep within an hour of falling asleep. This is why it's often hard to wake up after a long nap. Instead of feeling refreshed or rested, most people feel groggy and tired after napping for more than 30 minutes. So if you have to nap, keep it short!



Why should I wake up at the same time every morning?

Sleep is all about patterns and rhythms. Your brain can "learn" cues for getting ready for sleep, and this starts with having a consistent sleep routine. If your schedule changes a lot, your body has a hard time knowing when to go to sleep and when to stay awake. This can make falling and staying asleep at night very hard. One of the most powerful things you can do to improve your sleep is to **set a planned wake-up time each morning**.



Why should I only use my bed for sleeping?

Doing other things in bed, like homework, watching TV or playing on your phone "fools" the brain into thinking that the bed is a place for activity and **not a place for quiet sleep**. To make sure your brain links your bed with relaxation and rest, it's key that you find another place for homework and scrolling.

WHAT CAN I DO TO IMPROVE SLEEP?





Ready to make some changes? GREAT! These recommendations will help. Keep in mind that it can take time to see results after you make these changes—often 2–3 weeks.

If you are still having trouble sleeping after several weeks of consistently practicing these changes, definitely let your doctor know.

Things to do (and not do) during the day:



Did you know that what you do during the day impacts how well (or poorly) you sleep at night? Making helpful changes to your awake time can really improve your sleep.

- Don't rest or stay in bed during the day – your bed should just be for nighttime sleeping.
- After you wake up, go toward the light! Spending at least 10 minutes of time outside in daylight to start the day helps set the right pattern.
- Plan something fun to do in the morning so you have a good reason to get out of bed.
- Move your body every day (as recommended by your doctor, of course!)
- Eat healthy meals at regular times. It keeps your body on a good schedule!
- Don't drink caffeine (in soda, coffee, tea, energy drinks, etc.) after lunchtime.



Set up your bedroom for success.

Good news! There are a few simple changes you can make to your bedroom that may make it easier to fall asleep (and stay asleep) at night.

- Make sure your bedroom is a comfortable, sleep friendly place. Cozy bedding and cooler room temperature helps. Keep things quiet and dark with few distractions.
- Take all screens (computer, laptop, tablet) OUT of your bedroom. Even when you're not looking at them, they impact your stress and mood.
- At night, phones should be charged in a shared space (like the kitchen) and not in your bedroom. (You use your phone for an alarm, you say? Get yourself an alarm clock!)
- Use your bed only for sleeping (NOT for homework, watching movies, or other activities).

















Create a good bedtime routine.

It's important to create a transition between the chaos of the day and the calm of going to bed. A bedtime routine that includes calm and relaxing activities helps your body and mind find that sweet spot.

- Slow it down before bed. Try reading a book, listening to music, or doing relaxation exercises.
- Stay away from all screens (TV, phone, tablet, computer) at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Eat a light, non-sugary snack about 30 minutes before bed. Something like a piece of fruit or a few crackers and cheese is great. Avoid heavy meals withing an hour of going bed.
- If you often wake up to use the bathroom at night, stop drinking within 1 hour before bedtime.

Make a game plan.

It's not a good idea to lie awake in bed if you can't sleep after about 30 minutes. Making a plan for what to do if you can't fall asleep or stay asleep can really help!

- Get out of bed and try a calming or boring activity (reading with a small book light or a relaxation exercise). Then try to go back to sleep again after about 20 minutes.
- Turn your clock around so it cannot be seen from the bed. Looking at a clock during the night can cause stress and worry about sleep.
- Never use screens and devices (like phones, computers, TVs) in the middle of the night. It will make your brain think that it's morning.
- Put a notepad and pen next to your bed so you can write down thoughts that may keep you awake at night.

Create a sleep schedule.

Set a regular time to wake up, and do your best to stick to it no matter how well you slept. Actually, it is more important to have a set wake-up time than a set bedtime. Wake-up times shouldn't change by more than 1 hour, even on weekends.

- Do your best to avoid daytime naps.
- Plan to get into bed around 30 minutes before you typically have been falling asleep. For example, if you are falling asleep very late (1am), you should get into bed at 12:30am. Bedtimes can be moved earlier, once a set wake-up time is in place for one week.

Use relaxation or mindfulness.

To sleep, your body and mind need to be relaxed and comfortable. Learning self regulation skills like deep breathing, muscle relaxation, guided imagery, self hypnosis, and mindfulness can help you get ready for a good night sleep. These same skills can be used in the middle of the night if you wake up a lot from pain or for other reasons. There are a lot of great apps and online resources out there that can help with this!

For more in this series:

A collaboration between Meg Foundation and the Society of Pediatric Psychology Pain SIG

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