

Fixing technical problems for a good night's sleep as kids start a new school year

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Getting a good night's sleep often comes down to technique. Avoiding late-night technology use and keeping a regular sleep schedule are two important techniques to heed as kids head back to school.

Recent studies found that adolescents used multiple forms of technology late into the night, including gaming systems, cell phones, and computers. As a result, they demonstrated difficulty staying awake and alert throughout the day.

"Any factor that deteriorates the quality or quantity of sleep will lead to difficulty with school performance and [behavior problems](#)," said William Kohler, MD, medical director at Florida Sleep Institute. "When children stay up late at night texting in bed or playing computer games, they are increasing their risk for neurocognitive problems."

According to research presented at SLEEP 2010, the 24th Annual Meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies, having a regular bedtime was the most consistent predictor of positive developmental outcomes in four-year olds. In this 8,000-person sample, language, reading and math scores were higher in children whose parents reported enforcing regular bedtimes.

Disrupting the normal sleep pattern, whether with technology or not, can reset the brain's [circadian clock](#). A common problem, staying awake late and "sleeping-in" on the weekends, can make it difficult to fall asleep and wake-up during the week, so it is important to maintain a consistent

schedule all week long.

Kohler explained that the number of nightly sleep hours required by children varies by age. In general, five-year olds should get 11 hours of sleep, whereas nine-year olds need 10 hours and 14-year olds require only nine hours.

Parents can determine their children's individual sleep needs by helping them record their sleeping habits and issues in a sleep log. If the child is not alert and functioning properly during the day, sleep length should be gradually increased or decreased, or his or her bedtime routine should be adjusted.

For better sleep hygiene, Kohler recommended maintaining a routine bedtime pattern to prepare the brain for sleep. Exciting, high-energy activity should be avoided within one hour before lights-out. Pre-bedtime activities like drinking milk, taking a bath, teeth-brushing, and reading a non-stimulating book will signal to the brain that it's time to sleep. Exercise, caffeine, and sugary foods should be avoided. The ideal sleeping atmosphere is a dark, quiet room that is kept below 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Technology should be removed from the bedroom.

Insufficient sleep and poor [sleep](#) habits have been linked to health problems such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression, moodiness or irritability, reduced memory functioning, and delayed reaction time.

Provided by American Academy of Sleep Medicine

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