

# Study reveals that nearly half of foster caregivers have given melatonin to their child

June 5 2024

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

A new study to be presented at the [SLEEP 2024](#) annual meeting found that it is common for foster caregivers to give melatonin to their child, and these children who have taken melatonin have worse sleep and more daytime behavioral problems.

Results show that 48% of foster caregivers reported administering melatonin to their child. Children given melatonin had poorer overall sleep quality compared to children not given melatonin, yet even after adjustment for sleep quality and other potential confounders, melatonin use was associated with increased severity of daytime behavioral problems in foster children. However, melatonin use was not associated with symptoms of depression or anxiety.

"These results are eye-opening given that we know almost nothing about the safety or efficacy of melatonin use in this population because not a single study has focused on children with histories of neglect, abuse, and/or other traumas," said lead author Carter Baker, research coordinator for the Sleep and Anxiety Center of Houston at the University of Houston.

"Based on our analysis, major discrepancies exist between the science and common practice for some of our most [vulnerable children](#) and these gaps urgently need to be addressed."

According to a [2022 health advisory](#) from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, parents should talk to a [health care](#) professional before giving melatonin or any supplement to children. In the U.S., melatonin is considered a "[dietary supplement](#)"; therefore, melatonin is not under FDA oversight like other over-the-counter or prescription medications.

An increased use of the supplement in recent years has occurred along

with growing reports of melatonin overdose, calls to poison control centers, and emergency room visits for children.

Survey data were collected from 454 caregivers currently fostering children between the ages of 4 and 11 years in the U.S. Questions addressed whether they had ever administered melatonin to the foster child, aspects of the child's sleep, and emotional and behavioral problems. Children included in the sample were relatively diverse, with 17% Black/African American and 11% Hispanic children from 46 U.S. states.

"Compared to children in [foster care](#) not given melatonin, children taking melatonin were more likely to receive intensive levels of care, have younger foster caregivers, and spend more time in their current foster home on average," Baker added. "These findings suggest that [melatonin](#) use may be associated with other variables beyond sleep, which requires further study."

The research abstract was published recently in an [online supplement](#) of the journal *Sleep* and will be presented Wednesday, June 5, during SLEEP 2024 in Houston.

**More information:** Carter Baker et al, 0805 Melatonin Use Among Children in Foster Care: Associations with Sleep and Daytime Behavior, *Sleep* (2024). [DOI: 10.1093/sleep/zsae067.0805](https://doi.org/10.1093/sleep/zsae067.0805)

Provided by American Academy of Sleep Medicine

Citation: Study reveals that nearly half of foster caregivers have given melatonin to their child

(2024, June 5) retrieved 21 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-06-reveals-foster-caregivers-melatonin-child.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.