

A good night's sleep even more elusive for anxious children

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Managing routine sleep problems in children can be a testing time for parents as well as being highly stressful for the child. Add a child with anxiety to the mix and a good night's sleep for everyone can be elusive if not impossible.

Now a new study led by Associate Professor Jennifer Hudson, from the Centre for [Emotional Health](#) at Macquarie University published this month in the international journal, *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, sheds light on the sleep patterns of children diagnosed with anxiety, by comparing them to non-anxious children. The children in the study ranged in age from seven to twelve years old.

Most childhood problems associated with sleeplessness, such as delays going to sleep, night-time fears and difficulty sleeping alone, gradually resolve themselves as the non-anxious child ages. But for some children, anxiety about a range of issues leading to difficulty sleeping or falling asleep, may persist and can eventually cause more serious problems later in life if left untreated.

The researchers found that one in five anxious children have insufficient sleep while one in three have difficulty falling asleep. Results from the study showed that children with [anxiety disorders](#) go to bed much later and had considerably less sleep compared to non-anxious children. Significantly, these [sleep disturbances](#) did not occur on weekends and appeared to be limited to school nights.

During the week, the researchers found that school-aged children with anxiety disorders slept 30 minutes less than non-anxious children.

However, anxious children fell asleep quicker and were less awake on weekend nights.

Professor Hudson says that while 30 minutes less sleep per week night may initially seem small, the cumulative effect and its potential consequences on daytime performance may be significant.

“We know that school-aged children’s sleep is crucial for their overall quality of life and that sleep problems are associated with a range of cognitive and emotional difficulties so it’s important to resolve them as quickly as possible,” she says.

“What these studies show us is how important it is to treat sleep-related problems in anxious children,” says Hudson.

Provided by Macquarie University

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