

Sleep and sleep hygiene

Sleep is an essential part of our lives - during sleep our body regenerates, regains strength and the brain reinforces our memories. For children and adolescents, sleep is crucial for healthy development. If we don't get enough sleep, we may feel moodier, have trouble remembering things, difficulty concentrating, have a bigger appetite, and in the long run be more susceptible to health problems such as heart disease, obesity, depression and anxiety.

HOW MANY HOURS OF SLEEP DO WE NEED?



Adults need 7-9 hours of quality sleep a day to function healthily.



Younger children (ages 6-13) need 9-11 hours of sleep.



Teens need 8-10 hours.

However, it may happen that you or your child is not getting good quality sleep because of a particularly busy time in your lives. You may experience problems falling asleep, interrupted sleep (waking frequently during the night), tiredness and feelings of exhaustion when you wake up or during the day. What can you do at such times?

SLEEP HYGIENE

For a good night's sleep, it is important to practice sleep hygiene, a set of habits that prepare the body and mind for sleep. Here are a few steps you can include in your life or in your child's life to ensure better sleep.

- Create an **evening ritual** and try to follow it - read a book, take a bath, listen to quiet music or an audiobook. Your body will gradually get used to the fact that as soon as you start doing these activities, bedtime is coming. Create a ritual with your child as well - you can read a book before bedtime, or you can establish putting on "sleep socks" or a "protection blanket" with your child.
- Do not eat sweets or heavy foods in the evening, avoid drinking caffeine or alcohol, and try to cut out tobacco products completely.
- Try to do at least 20 minutes of any form of **physical activity** every day.
- Turn off electronic devices at least an hour before bedtime. It is important to avoid light stimulation of the brain, as it may disrupt falling and staying asleep
- Keep your bedroom **dark and cool** (ideally around 17 to 20°C) and **avoid doing activities in bed during the day** (working, studying etc) - your bed should only be used for sleeping.
- Go to bed and get up **at the same time** every day (even at the weekend).
- Invest in a good mattress, pillows and a sufficiently warm blanket.
- Do not sleep for more than 20 minutes during the day. Napping during the day makes it difficult to get a good night's sleep.
- If you have trouble falling asleep, do one of the calming exercises in the chapter called **How to help a child who is experiencing a panic attack or intense stress**.

If you or your child has long-term sleep problems, don't be afraid to see a professional. Sleep is an essential part of a healthy lifestyle and its quality needs to be guarded.