

Sleep and ASD

Efficacy Rating
NA

Sleep problems

Research suggests that children with ASD may be more likely to experience difficulties with their sleep than other groups of children. Problems have been identified in the onset of sleep, sleep maintenance, early waking, and irregular sleep-wake patterns and sleep routines and occur in high frequency regardless of intellectual level.

Although the causes of sleep problems in autism are currently unknown, there may be important associations between difficulties with sleep in children with ASD and communication challenges and difficult behavior during the day. Routines and social cues are thought to help young infants develop stable sleep-wake patterns with the longest sleep occurring during the night hours.

Sleep disturbances in autism create additional stress for families and require intervention strategies that are responsive to the child and family's needs.

Intervention

Intervention requires an approach in which a thorough history is taken regarding past and current sleep-wake behaviors and patterns, and "sleep hygiene" which refers to diet, pre-bedtime routines, sleep associations (i.e. transitional objects, bedding, co-sleeping, distractions, and sleep environments.)

Sleep associations and nighttime awakening/re-settling issues are common to all children and families, and can respond to behavioral and environmental approaches.

Both behavioral strategies and pharmacological treatments related to regulating the sleep-wake cycle (e.g., use of melatonin, other prescribed medications) have been used to manage reported sleep difficulties.

Families who have received some help managing their children's sleep problems most often report satisfaction with behavioral approaches. Establishing appropriate bedtime routines appears to be one effective behavioral strategy for which effectiveness has been reported.

An article reviewing the efficacy and safety of melatonin a hormone substance involved in sleep initiation is referenced below

<http://groups.msn.com/TheAutismHomePage/sleep.msnw>

Sleep and Autism Resources & Information

Websites:

<http://groups.msn.com/TheAutismHomePage/sleep.msnw>

Books:

Durand, V. M. (1998). *Sleep better! A guide to improving sleep for children with special needs*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.

Articles:

Autism spectrum disorders: A research review for practitioners (pp. 161-186). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing.

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Piazza, C. C., Fisher, W. W., & Sherer, M. (1997). Treatment of multiple sleep problems in children with developmental disabilities: Faded bedtime with response cost versus bedtime scheduling. *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, 39, 414-418.

Richdale, A. L. (1999). Sleep problems in autism: Prevalence, cause and intervention. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology*, 41, 60-66.

Richdale, A. L. & Prior, M. R. (1995). The sleep-wake rhythm in children with autism. *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 4, 175-186.

Ross & Whitehouse (2002). Melatonin treatment for sleep disorders in children with neurodevelopmental disorders: an observational study. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology*, 44: 339-44.

Wiggs, L., & Stores, G. (1996). Sleep problems in children with severe intellectual disabilities: What help is being provided? *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 9, 160-165.

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