

# The Impact of Sleep Disorders on Children: Understanding, Identifying, and Treating Common Issues

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## DESCRIPTION

Sleep disorders in children are a significant concern for parents and healthcare providers alike. Sleep is essential for a child's physical and mental development, yet many children experience disruptions that can affect their overall well-being. This article explores common sleep disorders in children, how to identify them, and effective treatment options available.

## Importance of sleep in childhood

Adequate sleep is important for children as it supports growth, cognitive function, and emotional regulation. Sleep needs vary by age, with newborns requiring 14 to 17 h, toddlers needing about 11 to 14 h, and school-aged children typically needing 9 to 12 h of sleep each night. Insufficient sleep can lead to behavioral issues, impaired learning, and increased susceptibility to illness.

## Common sleep disorders in children

**Insomnia:** Insomnia in children can manifest as difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking too early. This disorder may result from anxiety, stress, or poor sleep hygiene. Children with insomnia may appear fatigued during the day, struggle with attention, and exhibit mood swings.

**Sleep apnea:** Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) is characterized by repeated pauses in breathing during sleep due to airway obstruction. Common symptoms include loud snoring, gasping for air during sleep, and excessive daytime sleepiness. OSA can lead to serious health issues if left untreated, including cardiovascular problems and developmental delays.

**Nightmares and night terrors:** Nightmares are frightening dreams that can wake children and cause distress, while night terrors involve intense fear and agitation during sleep, usually without recollection upon waking. Nightmares are common in preschoolers, while night terrors are more prevalent in younger children and can be triggered by stress, fatigue, or changes in routine.

**Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS):** RLS is characterized by an uncomfortable urge to move the legs, often accompanied by strange sensations. This disorder can disrupt sleep and lead to difficulties in falling asleep, particularly in the evening. RLS can be caused by iron deficiency or may have a genetic component.

**Circadian rhythm disorders:** Circadian rhythm disorders occur when a child's internal body clock is misaligned with the typical day-night cycle. This can lead to difficulties in falling asleep at appropriate times and may result in excessive daytime sleepiness. Factors such as irregular sleep schedules and exposure to screens can contribute to these disorders.

**Identifying sleep disorders:** Recognizing sleep disorders in children can be challenging, as many symptoms may overlap with typical childhood behaviors. Parents should look for signs such as:

- Persistent difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- Excessive daytime sleepiness or fatigue
- Behavioral issues such as irritability or hyperactivity
- Frequent nightmares or night terrors
- Snoring or gasping during sleep

Keeping a sleep diary can help track patterns and identify potential problems. It's essential to note sleep duration, bedtime routines, and any disturbances during the night.

## Treatment options

**Improving sleep hygiene:** One of the first steps in treating sleep disorders is to establish good sleep hygiene. This includes

- Creating a consistent sleep schedule by having a set bedtime and wake time.
- Establishing a calming bedtime routine that may include reading, bathing, or quiet time.
- Ensuring the sleep environment is comfortable, dark, and quiet.
- Limiting exposure to screens and stimulating activities before bedtime.

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**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I):** CBT-I is an effective treatment for insomnia in children. This therapeutic approach focuses on changing unhelpful thoughts and behaviors related to sleep. It may include techniques such as relaxation training, cognitive restructuring, and sleep restriction.

**Medical interventions:** For more severe cases, particularly with conditions like sleep apnea or RLS, medical intervention may be necessary. A pediatrician or sleep specialist may recommend

- Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) therapy for sleep apnea.
- Medications to treat RLS or insomnia, if appropriate.
- Referral to a sleep clinic for further evaluation and treatment options.

**Addressing underlying issues:** Often, sleep disorders are linked to underlying issues such as anxiety or stress. Working with a

psychologist or counselor can help address these concerns, providing children with coping strategies to manage their feelings.

## CONCLUSION

Sleep disorders in children can have profound effects on their health and development. Early identification and intervention are crucial to ensuring that children receive the sleep they need for optimal functioning. By understanding common sleep disorders, employing effective treatments, and promoting healthy sleep habits, parents can help their children achieve restful and restorative sleep, prepare for for better health and happiness. If a suspect child may have a sleep disorder, consulting a healthcare professional is an essential step toward finding effective solutions.