



Eczema and Sleep



Contents

What is sleep?

Sleep is...

- **A natural behaviour** – sleep is part of everyone’s life. Eventually no matter how hard we fight it we will want to sleep for at least part of every 24 hours.
- **A reversible state of reduced awareness** – to our environment and surroundings.
- **Dynamic** – we do not turn off completely during sleep. There are lots of important processes occurring during sleep that are vital to our existence.

All animals sleep in response to natural rhythms. Human beings are the only animals that deliberately change the amount of sleep they have and their sleep patterns. **Our sleep is getting worse in the 21st century due to our 24/7 lifestyles.**

What does sleep look like?

Sleep patterns are shown as hypnograms – a hypnogram shows what our sleep looks like and the different types of sleep being experienced. The hypnogram below is one for a 9 year old sleeping a full 10-11 hours.

It is important to know that our bodies and brains are doing very specific things at different times during the sleep cycle. Each cycle is comprised of both non-REM and REM sleep.

During non-REM sleep – shown in blue, even though at times we may be in our deepest sleep, our bodies will still be working hard releasing hormones and renewing and repairing tissues.

REM sleep – shown in red, happens increasingly through the night. This is when we do our memory consolidation and is often when we dream.






At various points during the sleep cycle we may wake. This may only be for the briefest moment and we may not remember in the morning.

The body clock

Virtually every animal has a body clock that governs their circadian rhythm – Our body clocks are affected by external factors which, in turn, affect our internal rhythm, such as light, temperature, meal times and social activities. These are all important for keeping our body clock in rhythm and letting our body know when it is time to do different functions such as sleep, eat or be alert and able to concentrate.

It is as a result of our circadian rhythm that we are most likely to want to sleep during the dark hours of the late evening and early morning.

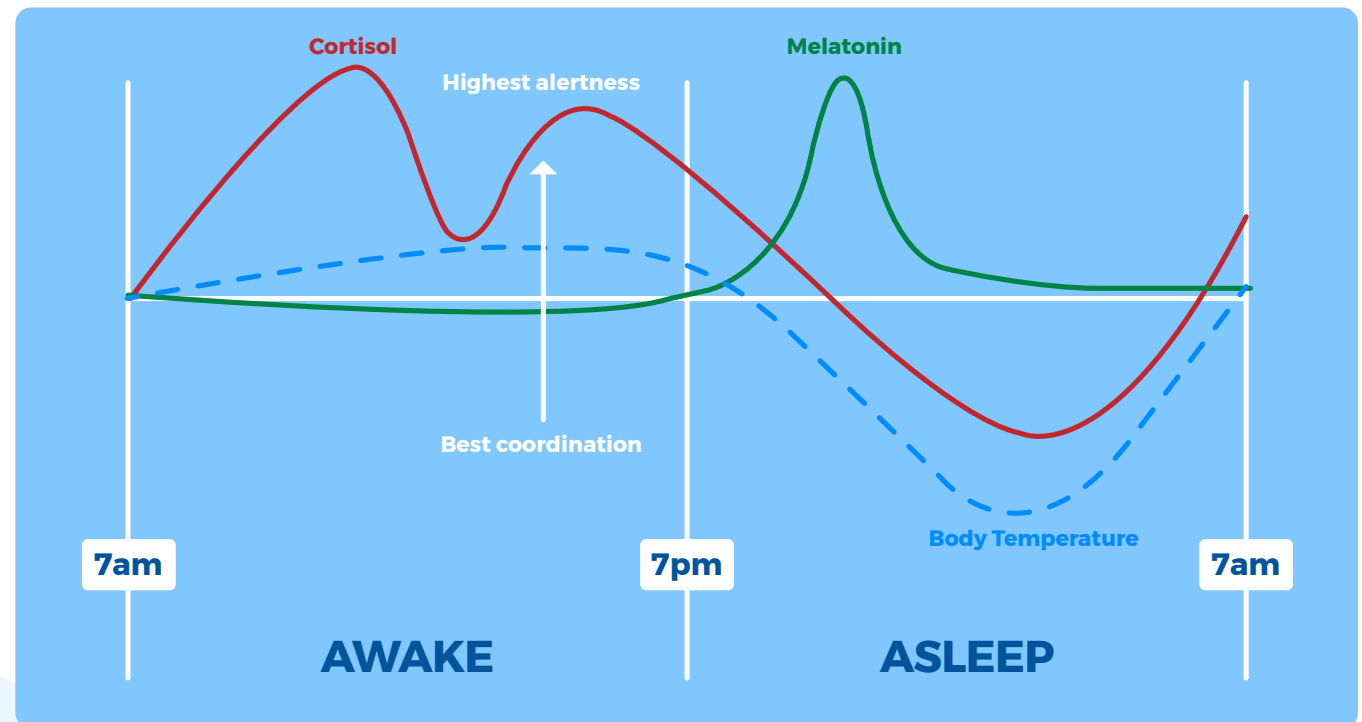
Our body clock manages:

-  Release of certain hormones
-  Sleep
-  Kidney function
-  Temperature
-  Muscle response

Our body clock prompts the release of two hormones which affect our sleep:

Melatonin – often called the ‘sleepy hormone’ because its release is one of the triggers that tells the body that it is time to prepare for sleep. Melatonin is released in response to the change from light to dark.

Cortisol – often called the ‘stress hormone’ because it wakes us up in the morning. Our bodies also create cortisol when we are stimulated. This can be from stress, anxiety or when we are excited. For children, lots of activities can create cortisol in the body such a playing with friends, watching TV or exercising. If we have too much cortisol in our bodies before bed, it will stop us falling asleep.



More on next page...

What might be stopping your child sleeping?

Their Routine

To make sure their bodies are creating melatonin and reducing cortisol at the right times, children need to have a consistent routine which signals to their body that it's time to sleep. Changes in bedtime routine or exciting activities just before bed can stop children from sleeping.

- Make sure your child has time to go outside and be active during the day, ideally before dinner.
- Try to avoid letting your child nap after 2pm. This includes falling asleep on the bus or in front of the TV. Children over the developmental age of 3 should not need to nap if they are sleeping well at night.
- Avoid stimulating activities which are loud or energetic in the hour before bed. Instead encourage your child to have quiet play, such as colouring or jigsaw puzzles.
- Ensure your child is going to bed and waking up at the same time every day – even at the weekends!

Lights & Electronics

If your child is interacting with anything that produces light before bed, this could be keeping them awake. While phones, TVs or tablets may seem to calm children down, the blue light emitted by screens is likely to prevent their bodies creating melatonin and the interaction can increase cortisol levels.

- Avoid activities which use screens an hour before bed and keep screens out of their bedroom.

Their Diet

Without regular meal times, your child's body clock may struggle to regulate their sleep consistently. Stimulants such as sugar and caffeine, especially in the evening will prevent sleep. Snacks less than an hour before bedtime may also disrupt their sleep.

- Make sure your child doesn't have any stimulating food or drinks including chocolate, coffee, tea, or cola in the late afternoon or evening.
- If they want a snack after dinnertime, try milk, toast or a banana, and have this is at least an hour before bed.

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What might be stopping your child sleeping? (continued)

Anxiety

There's lots of things that may make your child anxious and this could create cortisol in their bodies before bed. Some children may be anxious about being left alone in their bedroom, others may be anxious about not being able to fall asleep. Encourage your child to express how they are feeling and talk about what is making them feel this way. Do this earlier in the day, so they don't bring those feelings to the bedroom.

- Find ways to relax together using relaxation techniques, yoga or mindfulness.
- Try to stay calm around bedtime to support your child to feel the same.

Their Environment

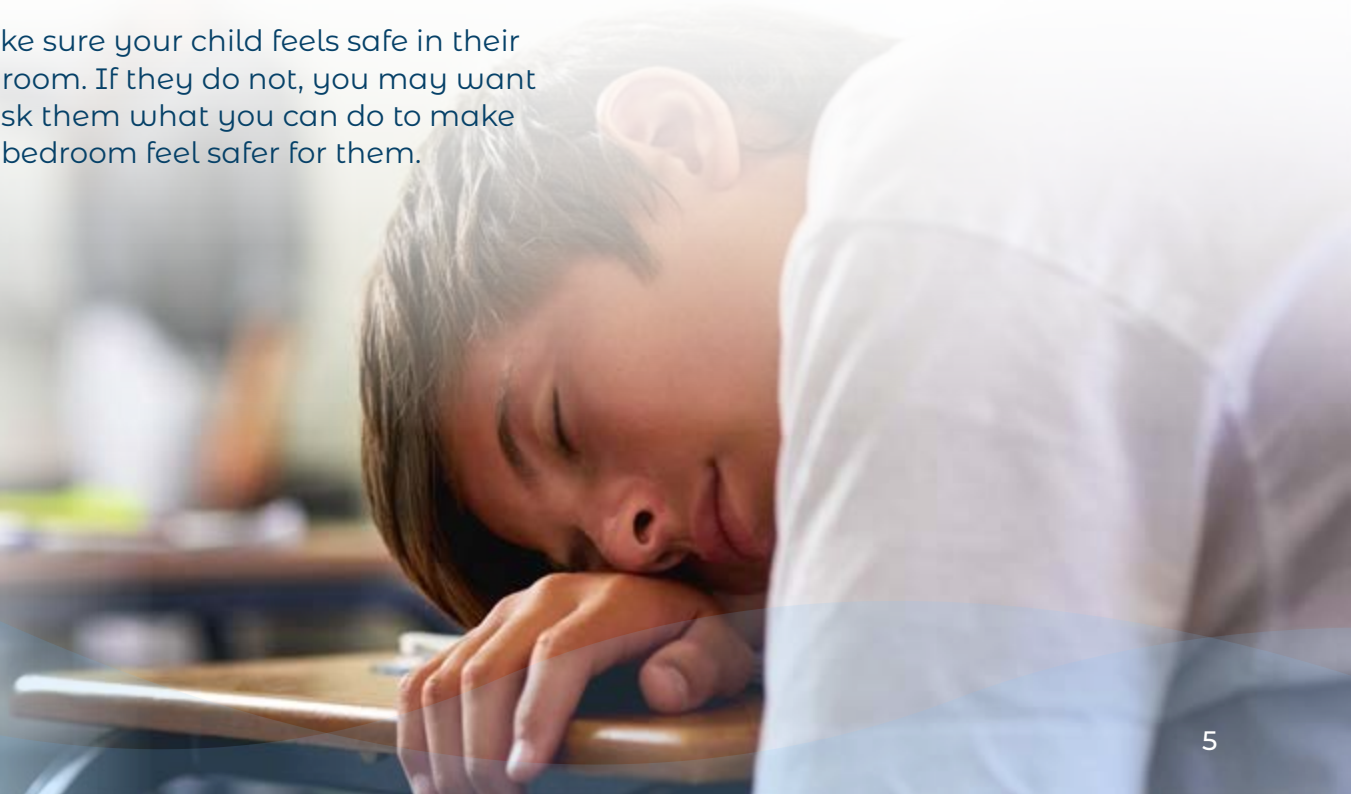
Even if children play in their bedrooms during the day, it's important that bedrooms become quiet, calm and dark before bedtime. Any stimulation before bed may keep your child awake. This could include sleeping in the same room as siblings, or even anxiety about being left alone in their bedroom.

- Where possible, try to ensure your child has a quiet, calm, dark bedroom to sleep in.
- Make sure your child feels safe in their bedroom. If they do not, you may want to ask them what you can do to make the bedroom feel safer for them.

Their skin

Eczema can be exacerbated at night because:

- Temperature decreases at night, which can make skin feel itchy.
- The effects of medication and creams may wear off during the night.
- More likely to scratch in their sleep.



Good bedtime practice

Example of a good bedtime routine for a 5/6 year old who is getting up around 7am.

This can be used as a rough guide, but you might want to adjust timings and activities to suit your family. It may be useful to print out a routine for you and your child to follow every day. Remember that consistency is key!

A Good Bedtime Schedule

| Time | Activity |
|--------|--|
| 5:30pm | Evening meal |
| 6:00pm | Play time |
| 6:30pm | Quiet play e.g. Jigsaw puzzles, train set |
| | Snack/supper |
| 7:20pm | Bath/wash, if suitable |
| 7:40pm | Cream, pyjamas, teeth cleaned and into bed |
| 7:45pm | A bedtime story |
| 7:55pm | Cuddles from family member |
| 8:00pm | Leave to settle |

Average Sleep Needs

Everyone is different, so different children of the same age may need a slightly different amount of sleep. Below are the ranges that you may expect at different ages, but be aware that some children need slightly less and others slightly more than the amounts described below.

| Age | Recommended |
|------------------------------------|----------------|
| Toddlers 1-2 years | 11 to 14 hours |
| Preschoolers 3-5 years | 10 to 13 hours |
| School-aged children 6-13 years | 9 to 11 hours |
| Teenagers 14-17 years | 8 to 10 hours |
| Young adults 18-25 years | 7 to 9 hours |

Based on recommendations by the National Sleep Foundation.

Before Bed:

- Avoid nap after 2pm
- No TV etc. an hour before bed
- Quiet play
- Snack if required, e.g. toast, cereal, milky drink
- Avoid sweets/ biscuits, fizzy drinks, tea, coffee, hot chocolate
- Routine should start no more than 1 hour before sleep time

Bedtime:

- Consistent bedtime and wakening
- Carry out steps in same order each night
- Relaxing bath, brush teeth, into bedroom
- Story – not too exciting
- Lights out
- Lots of praise in the morning

Bedtime:

- Clear messages
- Consistency
- Re-enforcement
- Timing
- Diet
- Sleep Hygiene

Good bedtime practice (continued)

Other considerations for children with eczema:

- If having a bath as part of the bedtime routine, try not to have the water too hot, and avoid scrubbing.
- Some children get very distressed when applying creams and other eczema treatments. Include some massage when applying cream to help bring down cortisol levels and take their mind off any distress.
- Wet wraps, or cool packs to soothe patches of itchy skin. Alternatively, store creams in the fridge so it is cooler when applied.
- Don't rush the time between bath, cream, pyjamas and into bed. The process can agitate skin, so allowing time for this to settle before lights out can help.
- Keep finger nails short. Scratch mittens may be suitable.
- Allergies can exacerbate itchy skin - think about food, irritants, dust etc. that could be making it worse.
- Our temperature naturally drops at night, which can make you itchy. Think about cotton bedding and clothing, as well as the timing of heating to support keeping the room temperature fairly cool at bedtime to avoid a dramatic temperature drop.
- Be aware of triggers. Stress and anxiety can trigger a flare, as can sleep deprivation, so think about how you can address these factors during the day.



Supporting every child to get a good night's sleep

Sleep Scotland Face to Face Sleep Counselling

See our website for your local area sleep counselling provision.

www.sleepscotland.org

Sleep Support Line

Our trained sleep counsellors are available to offer advice and guidance on your child or teenager's sleep issues.

0800 138 6565

Monday to Thursday, 10am to 4pm

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