

Human beings spend a third of their life asleep, and younger humans spend even more than that. Sleep is a vital part of a healthy day for the children in our care, every bit as important as a nutritious and balanced diet and regular physical activity. It is even MORE important for the children who suffer from chronic illnesses or have developmental issues or behavioral issues. (Not that these children need more sleep than healthy children, just that they can't tolerate a sleep problem as 'well' as their healthy siblings.) Pediatricians and Family Practitioners need to be alert to the evidence of sleep disturbance in their well-child care. A few simple questions that I would encourage all PCPs to ask at well-child visits:

Does your child sleep well, and how many hours of sleep is she/he getting per night?

Does anything interfere with your child's sleep; does he/she seem to rest well?

Does your child's behavior or school performance suggest that she/he might not be getting adequate sleep?

Are you satisfied with the quality and amount of your child's sleep?

Most of the issues raised by these questions can be easily addressed by the Primary Care Provider, using standard pediatric resources, including those provided by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, and the excellent book, **Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems** by Richard Ferber. A fraction will be at increased risk for Obstructive Sleep Apnea, and evaluation for this problem in children should generally include an in-laboratory polysomnogram ("sleep study"). Other issues may need referral to a specialist in Sleep Medicine, preferably one certified by the American Board of Medical Specialists.

Help your pediatric patients sleep better!

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