

# get some sleep!

If Fido's the only family member snoozing peacefully under your roof, it's time for some natural sleep solutions for the rest of the family.

by Marygrace Taylor



**W**e all need it, we all want it—so why can *getting* sleep be such a challenge? Busy families face all kinds of sleep obstacles, and a lack of shut-eye can have some very real health consequences. But instead of turning to not-so-natural sleep aids, here's how to help your family catch some ZZZs—and stay healthy—naturally.

## BABY

**The problem:** He hasn't met a night he'll sleep through.

**The issue:** Too little slumber can disrupt normal growth spurts and negatively affect babies' cognitive development, finds research from Emory University and the University of Montreal, respectively.

**The solution:** For infants less than 8 weeks old, the best thing to do is wait: Because they don't yet produce the sleep hormone melatonin that tells them daytime is for activity and nighttime is for resting, they get the sleep they need at odd hours, says Jodi Mindell, Ph.D., author of *Sleeping Through the Night: How Infants, Toddlers, And Their Parents Can Get a Good Night's Sleep*. But for older babies who aren't sleeping at night, a bit of structure can help, says Mindell. A nightly routine, like bathing, changing into pj's, and singing a lullaby, can signal a baby's brain that it's time to sleep. Starting when your baby is 3 to 6 months, you can start teaching her to self-soothe, says Mindell. Put him to bed when he's drowsy but awake, and either leave the room right away, or do it gradually, first by sitting near the crib, then the door, and so on. "There may be some tears, but you can tend to

him if he wakes at night in the beginning," says Mindell. "Eventually he'll develop the skills to soothe himself at bedtime—and in the middle of the night."



## KIDS

**The problem:** Your sweet little preschooler snores like a freight train and is drowsy during the day.

**The issue:** Sleep apnea, a blockage of the airway that

happens when throat muscles relax during sleep, could be to blame. And while it's more common in adults, sleep apnea affects up to three percent of preschoolers, whose smaller airways are more easily blocked by growing tonsils and throat tissue. The result? Snoring and less restful nighttime sleep; drowsiness and irritability during the day. Plus, non-apnea-related snoring affects up to 12 percent of young kids and is usually a symptom of another issue.

**The solution:** "Someone who is sleeping well should be quiet and virtually unnoticeable," says Jennifer Mariner, an advanced practice nurse who treats sleep apnea in Wilmington, Delaware. If your child snores loudly, frequently stops breathing for longer than six seconds, or is tired in the morning, talk to your pediatrician, who will likely refer you to a sleep specialist. Treatment may include a tonsillectomy or a nighttime breathing machine to help maintain airflow. If sleep apnea is ruled out, your doctor can determine if the snoring is related to something else, like allergies or a blocked septum.



### TWEENS

**The problem:** She stays up all night—then wants to sleep all day.

**The issue:** Late-night texting and computer time can set kids up for a serious lack of sleep, potentially leading to anxiety, depression, and difficulty learning, reports research from JFK Medical Center.

**The solution:** Tween and teen brains become temporarily wired to stay up later at night and sleep later in the morning than child or adult brains. And while you can't fight biology, you can certainly influence it, says Mary Carskadon, Ph.D., an adolescent sleep researcher the Sleep for Science Research Lab at Brown Medical School. Electronics should come out of your tween's room 30 minutes before lights out to signal the brain's clock that it's time to sleep. If your tween's still short on sleep, it's okay to let her get some extra winks on weekends—by *napping*. Getting up at the same time she does during the week (and nabbing extra sleep by napping later) helps reinforce the sleep-wake message you're trying to get across during the week. Naps won't erase the effects of long-term sleep deprivation, but they can temporarily refresh the mind and body, says Carskadon.



### PARENTS

**The problem:** One of you can't sleep, leaving both of you grumpy the next day.

**The issue:** One partner's sleep woes can keep the other awake—and trigger relationship tension, says University of Pittsburgh research.

**The solution:** Daily stress can make it tough to fall and stay asleep. Get back on track by protecting your sleep time (by, say, cutting off work by 8 p.m. or reading one fewer bedtime story). Also voice concerns when they arise to prevent pent-up irritation from coming out in unrelated ways, says Wendy Troxel, Ph.D., from the University of Pittsburgh's Sleep Medicine Institute. If you're annoyed that your partner sleeps through the night while you wake to his every move—say so! “The more in tune you are with your partner's feelings and sleep states, the greater your relationship satisfaction will be,” says Salvatore Insana, Ph.D., who studies sleep and human development at the University of Pittsburgh. ●

## HERBAL HELPERS

Still not snagging quality time with Mr. Sandman? These plant-based remedies may do the trick.

- **Green Babies Calm Baby Aromatherapy Mist** uses organic lavender and essential oils to soothe. A quick spray in the nursery can help babies fall asleep faster. (\$7 for 6 ounces, [greenbabies.com](http://greenbabies.com))
- **Heel Neurexan** dissolvable tablets are made with *coffea cruda*, a coffee-derived homeopathic remedy to allow busy kid and parent brains to turn off for sleep. (\$19 for 60 tablets, [heelusa.com](http://heelusa.com))
- **Bach RESCUE Sleep Liquid Melts** use sleep-promoting white chestnut in dissolvable capsules, helping children and grown-ups wake up refreshed. (\$10 for 28 pieces, [rescuere medy.com](http://rescuere medy.com))
- **Sprayology SleepEase** is a homeopathic remedy of stress-reducing valerian and passionflower, safe for kids and adults. Spray some under the tongue at bedtime. (\$22 for 1.4 ounces, [sprayology.com](http://sprayology.com))