



Children and Healthy Holidays

Experts say school-aged kids should get nine to 10-and-a-half hours of sleep. The National Sleep Foundation's Sleep in America poll found that 30% of elementary school kids do not get the recommended amount of sleep.

With the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, many children end up getting less sleep and staying up a lot longer since there is no school to worry about the next day. When children do not get enough sleep, their learning abilities go down. They are unable to focus, feel exhausted all the time or some even become hyperactive. One reason why they do not sleep enough is too much screen time especially during vacations. In addition, food routines are changed during the holiday season.

Many parents may ask why they should be concerned at all about sleep routines when the kids are off from school. The reason is that this "break from the routine" ruins established sleep patterns and children cannot just switch them on and off. Yes, kids can end up being able to nap during the daytime during the one or two weeks they are off, but when they are back in school, they can't do this anymore. Instead, they have trouble falling asleep at a regular bedtime and getting up in the morning. They go to school and can have issues learning and doing their schoolwork. It just becomes a vicious, never-ending cycle to the detriment of both parents and children.

Children need structure and stability in all patterns of their life, and this most certainly includes sleep. A well-rested child is ultimately happy and confident - ready to take on the world. This is not true for a non-rested child.

Sugar – Lots and Lots of Sugar - Food and exercise routines are also temporarily broken, often by too much holiday sugar! Too much sugar can lead to emotional and energetic children going up and down. Experts say to balance sugar with protein because protein takes time to digest. So, when a

child is coming down from a sugar rush, they will still have protein in their system. This is ultimately better for them.

Also encourage children to exercise despite being on school leave. Have them go out and play for at least 30 minutes to an hour a day (more so when possible). This will counteract any unhealthy snacks that have made their way into the diet during the holiday season. Video games are passive play and no energy expenditure, so games should be active instead.

So, during holiday time, parents may relax a bit on the daily routines but not extremely so where it would then be difficult for a child to bounce back. You want to keep your child healthy and active and ready to learn.

As with any medical concerns and questions with regards to your child, their pediatrician is an excellent source and wealth and knowledge on these topics. Schedule an appointment with him/her to address any issues or concerns you may have with regards to your children prior to the holidays.

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