

Sleep timing problems in children

If any of these problems persist or significantly distress you or your child, ask your GP for help

Problem	Symptom
Nocturnal Fears	The child is afraid to go to bed or wakes complaining of robbers, monsters or frightening dreams. The child appears fearful and anxious. Relatively easy to reassure child, but watch for severe or chronic cases.
Adjustment Sleep Disorder	Related to a period of acute stress, anxiety, or environmental change. May start when the child's security is suddenly threatened (such as arrival of a new baby, death of a grandparent, first day at school...). Associated with settling problems, early waking, anxiety and daytime sleepiness. Also, bodily symptoms such as aches, pains, or headaches; child often appears irritable or miserable.
Insomnia	Difficulty initiating or maintaining sleep, or waking too early
Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome	Sleep/wake time shifts at least 2 hours forward – later to sleep; later to wake. Amount of sleep may be normal, but phasing out of synch. Child may be reluctant to go to bed or get up at correct time. Can lead to mood disorders settling problems and daytime sleepiness. More common in adolescence.
Advanced Sleep Phase Syndrome	Sleep/wake time shifts at least 2 hours backward – earlier to sleep; earlier to wake. Amount of sleep may be normal, but phasing out of synch. Symptoms include extreme sleepiness before bedtime and early morning waking (often before 5am).
Obstructive Sleep Apnoea	Repeated episodes of breathing difficulty followed by partial waking with restless movements, then followed by loud 'snoring' and a return to sleep. Symptoms may include bedwetting, daytime sleepiness, irritability, and problems with concentration. Children may have enlarged tonsils or adenoids and be overweight

Sleep arousal problems in children

If any of these problems persist or significantly distress you or your child, ask your GP for help

Problem	Symptom
Sleepwalking	Child sits up in bed or walks in sleep, generally during first half of sleep; child is difficult to wake and will not remember episode on waking.
Confusional Arousals	Sudden arousal from sleep, generally during first half of sleep. Child may moan or mumble unintelligibly or thrash about in bed; child may appear confused or disorientated; child may appear awake but does not respond; attempts to wake child make matters worse. Episodes are sudden and can be startling.
Sleep Enuresis	Bedwetting after the age of 5, at least one episode per month.
Sleep Bruxism	The child's teeth make a loud grinding noise during sleep without the child being aware of it; sometimes there is muscle or face pain or headache. Episodes occur in bouts of 5–15 seconds and may be repeated many times during the night.
Nightmares	Long, frightening dreams that wake child; leaving them feeling anxious and afraid. Reassurance relatively easy. The child will be able to remember the dream.
Sleep Terrors	Child wakes from deep sleep, often with piercing scream. The child's eyes are open and dilated; heart is beating wildly. Appears to be in a state of intense fear. Child will resist all attempts of comfort or reassurance; may make things worse. Child may run around the room, colliding with furniture. If woken, child will be confused and disorientated. Child will not remember the event the following day. Episodes last a few minutes and subside naturally.
Restless limbs	Sudden brief muscular contractions of legs, arms, or head when falling asleep (sometimes just before sleep). Child may cry out or mutter.
