

Resources for Sleeping Problems in Children *by Judith Aronson-Ramos, M.D.*

Sleep problems are pervasive among families. They are among the top five reasons families visit their Pediatrician. Here are some guidelines and in resources that may be helpful.

The following books are excellent guides for parents on the prevention and treatment of sleep problems in children.

Solving Your Children's Sleep Problems, by Richard Ferber, M.D. This book was written in the 1970's and remains the classic text Pediatrician's recommend for the behavioral approach to correcting a sleep problem.

Nighttime Parenting: How to Get Your Baby and Child to Sleep, by William Sears, M.D. This book looks at the sleep issue from the perspective of the entire family and covers a wide range of sleep habits.

Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child, by Dr. Weissbluth. This is a step-by-step guide to solving sleep problems. It includes information about what to expect as typical behavior at different ages.

Melatonin is widely used as a sleep-promoting agent. It must be given at night thirty to sixty minutes before bedtime. It functions best and most physiologically if we mimic natural sleep cycles – given under darkness, when approaching sleep etc. For more information about dosages and safe available preparations go to www.consumerlabs.com or www.supplementwatch.com . For more specific information relating to its usage in children go to www.keepkidshealthy.com In general the recommended dosage for a child will range from 0.3mg to 9 mg. There are many different types of melatonin including immediate and delayed release. This should be used under the care of a physician especially if your child is taking other medications. Melatonin works by enhancing the body's own natural secretion of the hormone, melatonin which is naturally secreted by the pineal gland in the brain. There are published studies in reputable journals, which have documented the positive effects of melatonin in promoting sleep and its safety.

"Sleep Hygiene" is a term, which refers to the condition right before and during sleep. It involves the use of a consistent bedtime routine with children and limiting over stimulating activities or foods right before bedtime. Many children struggle with the transition from wakefulness to sleep and need to learn ways to self-calm and let go. Parents can help in this process by giving children the tools they need: structure, routine, bedtime story or ritual, limiting noise, TV, video games, phone calls, emailing etc late at night. Most children need 8-10 hours of sleep at night. Teenagers actually need closer to ten hours of sleep at night due to hormonal fluctuations. Fatigue will always make it more difficult to perform well in school and control one's behavior the

next day. Some children have added difficulty falling asleep due to the effects of their medication. In these cases the child may need extra time to wind down with calming quiet activities in his or her bedroom: reading, drawing, journaling etc. Even though a medication may make it more difficult the same principles of sleep hygiene apply. In specific circumstances a supplement or medication may be needed to regulate a true sleep disturbance.