

SLEEP Aides

Judith Aronson-Ramos, M.D.

www.draronsonramos.com

The primary approach to sleep in children is behavioral. The term we use is good **sleep hygiene** this means effective limit setting, sticking to a routine, keeping the bedroom dark, cool and quiet, eliminate extraneous sources of light, using a sound machine or other white noise if ambient sound is a problem, transitional objects (toys, blankies etc), keeping bed time consistent, reward charts and motivators for good sleep habits, limiting caffeine, and disconnecting from electronics at least one hour before bed. If all of these approaches fail, some parents turn to other remedies which include herbal supplements (melatonin, valerian, lemon balm), teas (chamomile and lemon balm), and aroma therapy (lavender oil), and calming activities (bath time, soothing music, bedtime story etc). The national expert on sleep is Dr. Judith Owens and I would recommend her website <http://www.childrenssleepnetwork.org> Here there are parent resources and handouts. Also you can download a sleep log to track and analyze your child's sleep habits.

I would recommend the following sleep interventions and products ranked in order from least harmful to insufficient data. Anything on the list is a viable alternative to try provided risks are understood. As with all supplements taken internally I recommend the website www.consumerlabs.com to research the best product available. Remember in the USA there is no regulation of supplements or claims made by companies making them.

Aromatherapy with essential oils -Lavender/Chamomile – The aromas of these essential oils have been known to have calming, relaxing, and hypnotic effects. You put a small amount of the essential oils directly on the skin, or on potpourri, or a diffuser. Try rubbing a small amount of these essential oils on wrists or ankles. There are other aroma products which may also be calming.

Sound – There are sound machines you can purchase which generate a variety of calming sounds. There are also apps available which you can play from phones, tablets, or computers. Many of these programs have timers. Also relaxation CD's with specific ambient sounds and music.

Ear Plugs/Eye Masks – These can work for teenagers and young adults.

Herbal Teas – Chamomile and Lemon Balm – These teas can be mixed with any milk or honey for flavor and can be given cold or hot. They have mild flavors, there are no side effects and may provide a calming effect. I would recommend organic teas to be safe.

The supplements listed below are generally safe in older children (5 years and up), in toddlers 2-5 years melatonin or lemon balm are safe to try. There is insufficient data to recommend Valerian in the youngest age group.

Melatonin – This is a chemical naturally secreted by the pineal gland in the brain. It is synthesized from the amino acid tryptophan. Secretion is based on a circadian rhythm and coincides with our natural sleep cycles. In children with special needs numerous factors may interfere with melatonin's cyclic release causing sleep problems. Medications also can make

sleep onset difficult and melatonin may help. Melatonin supplements are synthesized from plant but function the same as our naturally secreted melatonin. Go to www.consumerlabs.com to research the safest tested products on the market. There are many different forms keep in mind if using a delayed release preparation you cannot cut or crush it, this will interfere with the delayed release properties. There is a liquid, pill and capsule form. Dosage is between 0.3-5 mg and is given 30-60 min before bed. Though no serious side effects have been reported, do not use it continuously. There have been some studies showing it may interfere with puberty in some children and/or worse nighttime asthma. Primary use is to help with SLEEP ONSET not sleep maintenance, use of the delayed release form can be trialed if maintaining sleep is the issue.

Lemon Balm – This can be used as a supplement, a tea, a combination product (most commonly with Valerian Root), or as a stand alone supplement. When taken orally for its calming effect, the standard dosage of lemon balm is 1.5 to 4.5 g of dried herb daily; extracts and tinctures should be taken according to label instructions. There have been no reported serious side effects.

Valerian Root – There is less safety data available for use of this herb in children. Most recent research failed to validate its effectiveness as a sleep aide. It continues to be studied for use in sleep and anxiety. It is widely used in Germany. Part of the problem with Valerian is inconsistency in the potency and purity of the products on the market. Many tested products in the past have shown signs of heavy metal contamination or lack of potency. You must research any product you use for these concerns. www.consumerlabs.com has an excellent review of the best products on the market. Be aware that as an herb it has roots, leaves, and stems it is the root (*valeriana officianalis*) which appears to have the potent chemical which can help with sleep and anxiety relief. In choosing a product, look for one with a dose of “root extract” 300-600 mg and proof there is no heavy metal contamination.