



Primary School Children

Night waking problems

Sleeping Sound

There are many reasons why children wake up during the night; these are some of the most common ones.

Sleep association

Some children are unable to fall back to sleep without a special person, thing or activity after waking up. This is called *sleep onset association disorder* and can stop children getting to sleep too. Key features are:

- your child needs something (e.g. music, certain toy) or someone (e.g. mum or dad) to get to sleep at the start of the night and/or fall back to sleep overnight and
- if that something or someone is not there, they will not be able to get to sleep at the start of the night or fall back to sleep over night.

Night terrors

These can be really scary for parents. Your child wakes suddenly with a loud scream or cry and when you go in to them, they are often staring straight ahead and look terrified. They affect at least 3% of children and are more common if children are sick or overtired. Night terrors:

- usually happen before midnight
- are not remembered by your child in the morning (unlike nightmares – see below) and
- occur when your child gets “stuck” between deep (quiet) and light (active) sleep cycles. Your child’s body is awake but their mind is not so they do not remember the event unless you are able to wake them up!

Nightmares

These are frightening dreams that usually wake your child up completely. They are very common in children especially if they are overtired or sick. Nightmares:

- usually happen after midnight which is different from night terrors
- can be remembered by your child usually as a frightening dream and
- happen when your child is in light sleep so that you child wakes up fully and wants to be comforted.



Anxiety

We do not really know how common anxiety is as a cause of sleep problems in school children, but it is probably common. Children with anxiety may:

- lie in bed worrying about things
- stay in their bed rather than getting in and out of bed all the time and
- be a ‘worrier’ in general about life.

Restless Legs

Children with restless legs have an uncomfortable feeling in their legs when trying to fall asleep or during the night. Children with restless legs may:

- describe the uncomfortable feeling as a “creepy/crawly” or “pulling” feeling. This feeling may also be described as “growing pains”
- move around a lot in bed to try to stop the uncomfortable feeling
- walk or pace around at bedtime
- be unable to sit still for a long time and
- be tired or cranky the next day due to lack of sleep.

