



Eczema and Sleep



Contents

What is eczema?

Eczema is a skin condition that affects 1 in 5 children in the UK and is different for everyone.

- If you have eczema, the top layer of your skin works differently, allowing water to escape and making the skin dry, itchy, and sore.
- Eczema can appear red on lighter skin and darker brown, grey or purple on skin of colour.
- Treatments for eczema might not make it go away for good but there are lots of things you can use to control it. GPs and dermatology teams can prescribe treatments that can help.

Eczema is **not** contagious. It is caused by our DNA, environmental factors and the immune system or a combination of all these things.

Getting support for eczema

Eczema Outreach Support is a UK-wide charity supporting children and their families with eczema.

We understand that eczema is more than just itchy skin and that it can be a painful and debilitating condition which can have a huge impact on a child or young person's quality of life.

Sometimes talking to someone who "gets it" can make such a difference. We can offer a listening ear, reliable information, the opportunity to connect with other families and support for your child at school. You are not alone, we can support you.

Join for free at www.eos.org.uk



Getting support for sleep

Sleep Action supports children and young people with sleep issues.

Families can access support through our Sleep Support Service.

We can offer families detailed, one-to-one sleep support. Our Sleep Advisors complete a telephone sleep assessment, asking questions on current routines, diet, exercise, and the sleep issue. As appropriate we refer some families on to one of our Sleep Counsellors with a background in specific additional support needs. They will then create a sleep plan of cognitive and behavioural changes. Get in touch to access via email

sleepsupport@sleepaction.org



What is sleep?

Sleep is...

- **A natural behaviour** – sleep is part of everyone's life. Eventually no matter how hard we fight it we will want to sleep for at least part of every 24 hours.
- **A reversible state of reduced awareness** – to our environment and surroundings.
- **Dynamic** – we do not turn off completely during sleep. There are lots of important processes occurring during sleep that are vital to our existence.

All animals sleep in response to natural rhythms. Human beings are the only animals that deliberately change the amount of sleep they have and their sleep patterns. **Our sleep is getting worse in the 21st century due to our 24/7 lifestyles.**

What does sleep look like?

Sleep patterns are shown as hypnograms – a hypnogram shows what our sleep looks like and the different types of sleep being experienced. The hypnogram below is one for a 9 year old sleeping a full 10-11 hours.

It is important to know that our bodies and brains are doing very specific things at different times during the sleep cycle. Each cycle is comprised of both non-REM and REM sleep.

During non-REM sleep – shown in blue, even though at times we may be in our deepest sleep, our bodies will still be working hard releasing hormones and renewing and repairing tissues.

REM sleep – shown in red, happens increasingly through the night. This is when we do our memory consolidation and is often when we dream.






At various points during the sleep cycle we may wake. This may only be for the briefest moment and we may not remember in the morning.

The body clock

Virtually every animal has a **body clock that governs their circadian rhythm** – Our body clocks are affected by external factors which, in turn, affect our internal rhythm, such as light, temperature, meal times and social activities. These are all important for keeping our body clock in rhythm and letting our body know when it is time to do different functions such as sleep, eat or be alert and able to concentrate.

It is as a result of our circadian rhythm that we are most likely to want to sleep during the dark hours of the late evening and early morning.

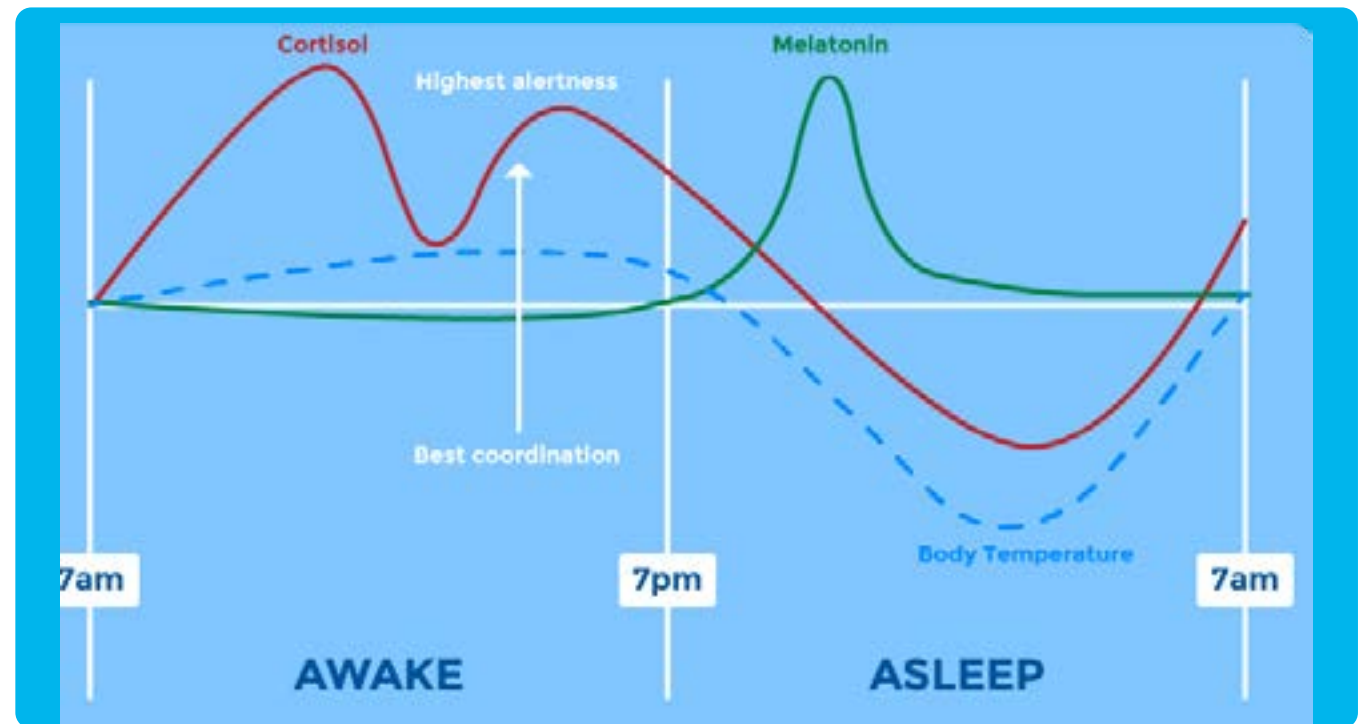
Our body clock manages:

-  Release of certain hormones
-  Sleep
-  Kidney function
-  Temperature
-  Muscle response

Our body clock prompts the release of two hormones which affect our sleep:

Melatonin – often called the ‘sleepy hormone’ because its release is one of the triggers that tells the body that it is time to prepare for sleep. Melatonin is released in response to the change from light to dark.

Cortisol – often called the ‘stress hormone’ because it wakes us up in the morning. Our bodies also create cortisol when we are stimulated. This can be from stress, anxiety or when we are excited. For children, lots of activities can create cortisol in the body such as playing with friends, watching TV or exercising. If we have too much cortisol in our bodies before bed, it will stop us falling asleep.



More on next page...

What might be stopping your child sleeping?

Their routine

To make sure their bodies are creating melatonin and reducing cortisol at the right times, children need to have a consistent routine which signals to their body that it's time to sleep. Changes in bedtime routine or exciting activities just before bed can stop children from sleeping.

- Make sure your child has time to go outside and be active during the day, ideally before dinner.
- Try to avoid letting your child nap after 2pm. This includes falling asleep on the bus or in front of the TV. Children over the developmental age of 3 should not need to nap if they are sleeping well at night.
- Avoid stimulating activities which are loud or energetic in the hour before bed. Instead encourage your child to have quiet play, such as colouring or jigsaw puzzles.
- Ensure your child is going to bed and waking up at the same time every day – even at the weekends!

Lights & electronics

If your child is interacting with anything that produces light before bed, this could be keeping them awake. While phones, TVs or tablets may seem to calm children down, the blue light emitted by screens is likely to prevent their bodies creating melatonin and the interaction can increase cortisol levels.

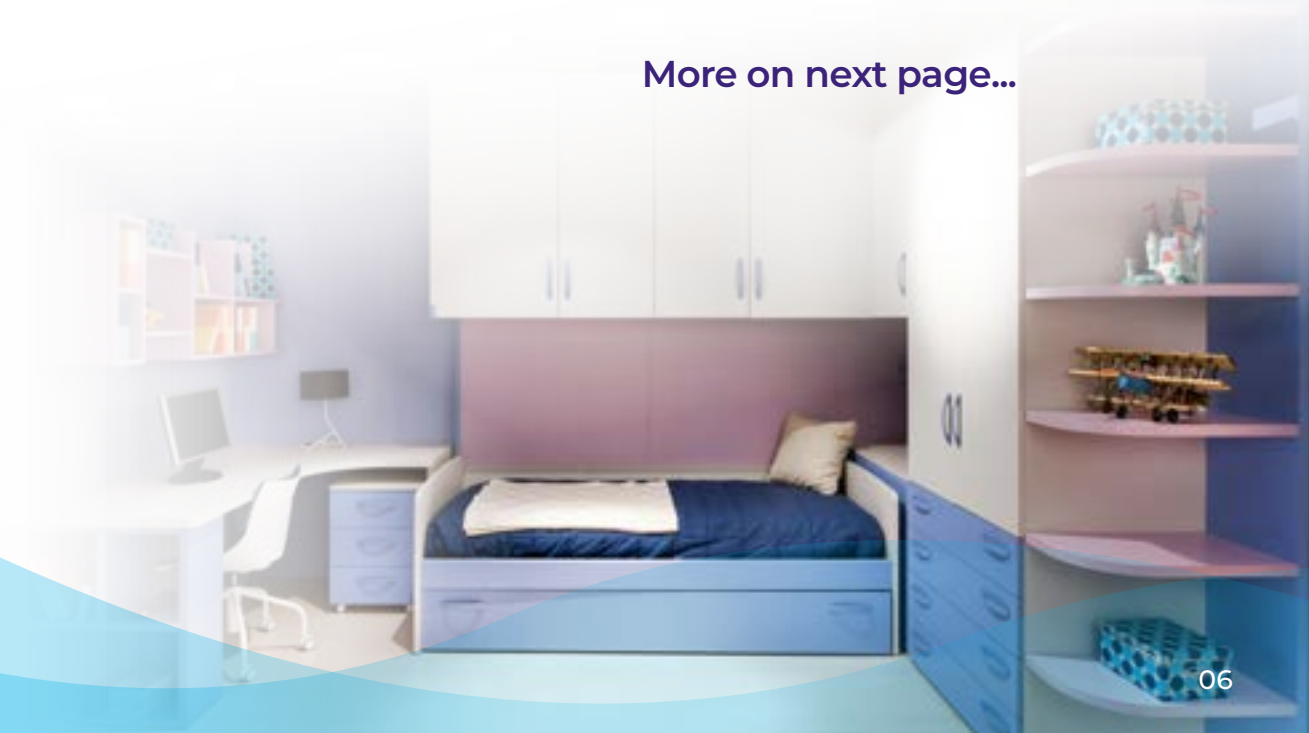
- Avoid activities which use screens an hour before bed and keep screens out of their bedroom.

Their diet

Without regular meal times, your child's body clock may struggle to regulate their sleep consistently. Stimulants such as sugar and caffeine, especially in the evening will prevent sleep. Snacks less than an hour before bedtime may also disrupt their sleep.

- Make sure your child doesn't have any stimulating food or drinks including chocolate, coffee, tea, or cola in the late afternoon or evening.
- If they want a snack after dinnertime, try milk, toast or a banana, and have this is at least an hour before bed.

More on next page...



What might be stopping your child sleeping? (continued)

Anxiety

There's lots of things that may make your child anxious and this could create cortisol in their bodies before bed. Some children may be anxious about being left alone in their bedroom, others may be anxious about not being able to fall asleep. Encourage your child to express how they are feeling and talk about what is making them feel this way. Do this earlier in the day, so they don't bring those feelings to the bedroom.

Stress and anxiety can trigger a flare, as can sleep deprivation, so think about how you can address these factors during the day.

- Find ways to relax together using relaxation techniques, yoga or mindfulness.
- Try to stay calm around bedtime to support your child to feel the same.

Even if children play in their bedrooms during the day, it's important that bedrooms become a sleep-only space before bedtime. Any stimulation before bed may keep your child awake. This could include sleeping in the same room as siblings, or even anxiety about being left alone in their bedroom.

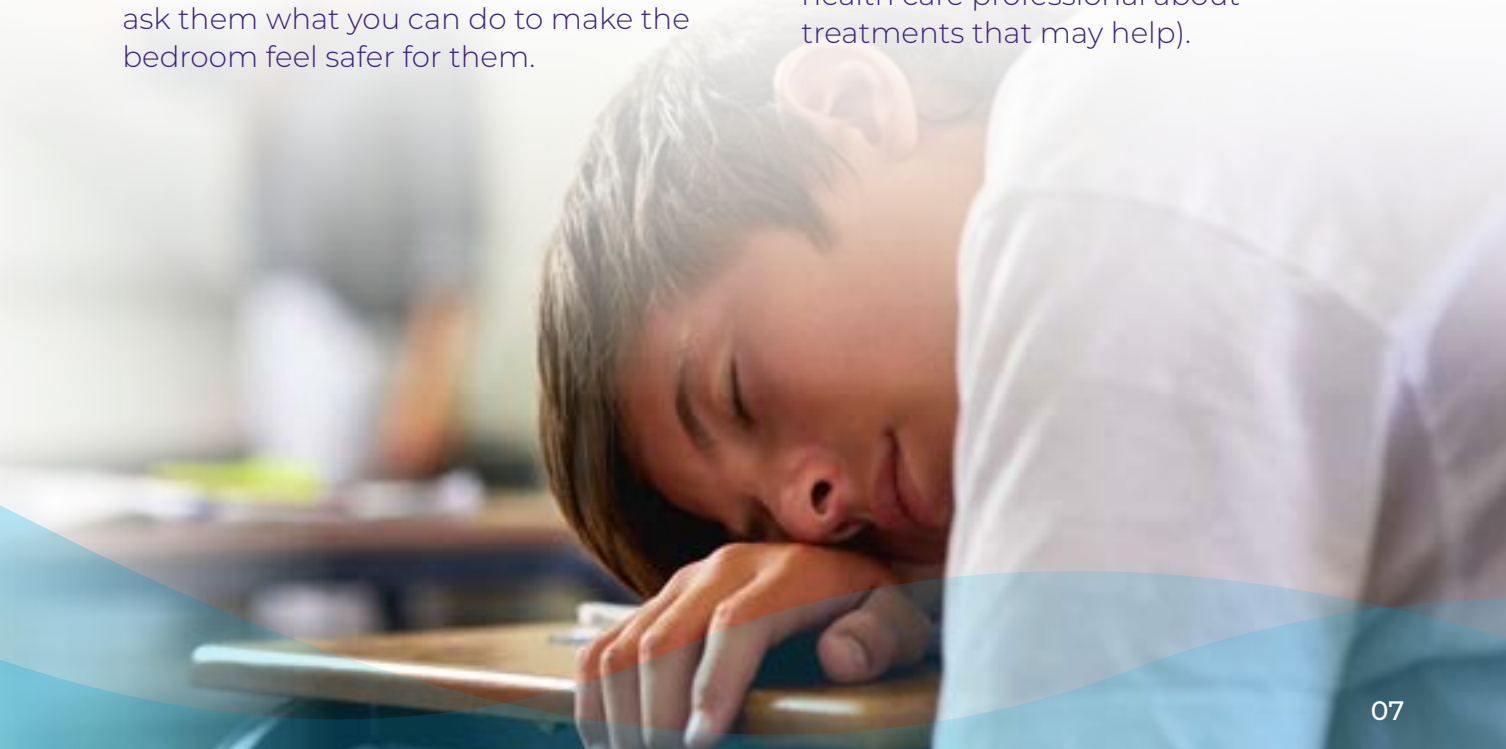
- Where possible, try to ensure your child has a quiet, calm, dark bedroom to sleep in.
- Make sure your child feels safe in their bedroom. If they do not, you may want to ask them what you can do to make the bedroom feel safer for them.

Their skin

The skin is the largest organ in the body and so it's not unusual for skin conditions such as eczema or psoriasis to affect your child's sleep. If you are concerned that your child's sleep is impacted by a skin condition it's important to:

- Speak to a health care professional about your concerns.
- Follow a current treatment plan if you have one (if not you can speak to your health care professional about treatments that may help).

Their environment



Eczema and sleep

Disturbed sleep can be one of the most difficult aspects of having a child with eczema.

If you find that night-time is a struggle because of your child's eczema, remember that you are not alone and many families face similar challenges. More than half the members of Eczema Outreach Support mention that they have issues with sleep when we speak to them.

They often say that their child's eczema is even more itchy at night and they can wake themselves up with scratching which can lead to a disturbed sleep for the whole family.

- Eczema that is well managed will cause less sleep disturbance. It is important to follow your child's treatment plan to try and keep the eczema under control. If you feel that the current treatment plan isn't working, then let your health care professional know and also tell them if the eczema is having a negative impact on sleep. They might be able to offer some useful advice.
- We know that if the eczema is severe or if there is a bad flare up, families might do things differently to help get a better night's sleep for everyone. When the eczema is more under control, this might be a good time to start getting into a better bedtime routine following the advice to the right and the next few pages.

Good bedtime practice

Here is an example bedtime routine for a 5/6 year old who is getting up around 7am.

This can be used as a rough guide, but you might want to adjust timings and activities to suit your family and eczema treatment. Applying creams, bandages etc. can be time consuming and you don't want to do it too close to bedtime if your child finds it distressing.

Remember that consistency is key!

Time	Activity
5:30pm	Evening meal
6:00pm	Play time
6:30pm	Quiet play e.g. jigsaw puzzles, train set Snack/supper
7:00pm	Bath, if suitable, or wash and brush teeth
7:15pm	Cream, pyjamas, and into bed
7:45pm	A bedtime story
8:00pm	Cuddles and lights out

Good bedtime practice

Average sleep needs

Everyone is different, so different children of the same age may need a slightly different amount of sleep. Below are the ranges that you may expect at different ages, but be aware that some children need slightly less and others slightly more than the amounts described below.

Age	Recommended
Toddlers 1–2 years	11 to 14 hours
Preschoolers 3–5 years	10 to 13 hours
School-aged children 6–13 years	9 to 11 hours
Teenagers 14–17 years	8 to 10 hours
Young adults 18–25 years	7 to 9 hours

Based on recommendations by the National Sleep Foundation.

Before bed:

- Avoid nap after 2pm
- No TV etc. an hour before bed
- Quiet play
- Snack if required, e.g. toast, cereal, milky drink
- Avoid sweets/ biscuits, fizzy drinks, tea, coffee, hot chocolate
- Routine should start an 1 hour before sleep time

Bedtime:

- Consistent bedtime and wakening
- Carry out steps in same order each night
- Relaxing bath (if suitable), brush teeth
- Apply creams/bandages etc. Use downward strokes when using emollients
- Story – not too exciting
- Lights out
- Lots of praise in the morning

eczema:

- **Cooling products** can help soothe sore, itchy skin
 - try pressing a **cool pack** from the fridge onto the skin or use cooling gel mats and/ or pillows to help keep your child cooler during the night
 - **Pyjamas put in the freezer** for ten minutes before bedtime can also feel soothing on the skin
 - **Emollient creams** kept in the fridge can offer cooling relief when applied before bedtime (ointments, however, should not be kept in the fridge)
- The right **bedding and bed clothes** can make all the difference.
 - Use cotton pyjamas and bedding
 - Use an anti-allergy mattress protector/ pillowcase to reduce dust mites
 - Avoid drying bedding outside to minimise exposure to allergens
- Think about the **bedroom**.
 - Regularly dust your child's room with a damp cloth and Hoover to limit exposure to dust mites and other allergens
 - Keep pets out of the bedroom
 - Keep the bedroom cool (ideally 16-18°C), and use lighter duvets and close blinds/ curtains through the day in warmer months.

Other considerations for children with