

## Sleep problems



Sleep related problems have been identified in both children and adults with Tourette Syndrome (TS). The different sleep problems people may experience include:

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Frequent waking at night (not necessarily due to tics)
- Difficulty getting back to sleep
- Sleep walking
- Sleep talking
- Nightmares
- Increased non-tic movements, i.e. tossing and turning in bed

We need sleep in order to restore and rejuvenate, to grow muscle, repair tissue and synthesize hormones. Researchers have also shown that after people sleep, they tend to retain information and perform better on memory tasks.

(National Sleep Foundation – [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org))

Therefore interrupted and/or lack of sleep can lead to problems such as:

- Poor memory and concentration
- Difficulty in regulating emotions
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Grogginess

The impact of these problems can affect daily life such as how someone functions at school or in work. And constant waking throughout the night can be stressful for partners and other family members.

Children need more sleep than adults because they are growing and learning at such rapid rates, therefore they need lots of sleep for optimal development and alertness.

It has been documented that sleep problems increase in children with co-occurring conditions such as ADHD and anxiety.

(Chowdhury and Murphy, 2017)

### Practical steps to improve sleep

- Keep a bedtime routine and ensure that bedtime and wake-up times are the same each day.
- Ensure that your bedroom is conducive to sleep, i.e. dark, quiet and comfortable. Turn off, or better still remove devices such as phones, computers etc.
- Regular exercise
- Avoid food or drinks containing caffeine in the late afternoon or evening

### Treatment

The supplement Melatonin is sometimes prescribed to help people with TS who have sleep difficulties. Melatonin is a naturally occurring hormone produced by the pineal gland in the brain which helps control sleep and wake cycles. Other medications to help with sleep may also be prescribed by a GP.

If you experience sleep problems, the first step should be to see your GP. If you are under the care of a consultant for your TS, you should also alert them to the difficulties you are having with your sleep.

### References

Chowdhury, U. and Murphy, T. 2017.  
*Tic Disorders: A Guide for Parents and Professionals.*  
Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.