

- [Student association](#)
- [Masters Students](#)
- [News](#)
 - [News stories](#)
 - [Insights & opinions](#)
 - [Awards](#)
 - [Events](#)
- [Support us](#)
 - [Donate to MCRI today](#)
 - [Value of philanthropy](#)
 - [Philanthropic funds](#)
 - [Make an ongoing monthly gift](#)
 - [Make a major gift](#)
 - [Bequests and gifts in Wills](#)
 - [Become a corporate supporter](#)
 - [Fundraise your own way](#)
 - [Give in memory or celebration](#)

[Donate](#)

[Home](#) [Impact](#) [A-Z child and adolescent health](#) **[Sleep](#)**

Sleep

Sleep is important for growth, immunity, learning and memory. Sleep provides energy to work, play and function properly.

asks Prof Harriet Hiscock about the importance of sleep research for children



One in three Australian children has trouble sleeping.

Watch as Indi asks Professor Harriet Hiscock about the sleep research done at MCRI.

Watch as Indi asks Professor Harriet Hiscock about the sleep research done at MCRI.



Good sleep habits

Good sleep habits are essential to the health, wellbeing, development and learning of infants and children. Babies, children and teenagers need different amounts of sleep as they age.

Sleep restores children physically, boosts immunity and helps protect them from sickness. Children also produce growth hormones while asleep.

Lack of adequate sleep impacts coping skills, behaviour and coordination. Childhood sleep issues are linked to inattention and unhappiness, plus poorer learning, memory formation and social/emotional skills.

Most adolescents sleep less than the recommended amount on school nights. This is linked to depression and anxiety.

Children with [autism spectrum disorder \(ASD\)](#), [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](#) and certain respiratory or developmental conditions are more prone to sleep problems.

Infant sleep problems are related to increased risks of postnatal depression.



Who does it affect?

Who does it affect?

- At least one in three Australian children has trouble falling asleep or has trouble staying asleep throughout the night.
- Sleep problems affect more than [one-third of infants](#).
- [20 per cent of mothers](#) report severe and persistent baby sleep problems in the first year of life.
- Up to 70 per cent of children with ADHD suffer from behavioural or medically-based sleep problems and up to 80 per cent of children on the autism spectrum have sleep difficulties.
- One-quarter of 12 to 13-year-olds and half of 16 to 17-year-olds in Australia don't get enough sleep on school nights.

Our sleep research

Our sleep research

Our researchers at Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) discovered that conducting two sessions with parents on healthy sleep habits and behavioural strategies resulted in improved sleep for [children with ADHD](#).

We also found that a brief intervention not only improves sleep in [children with autism](#), but also their wellbeing and quality of life. Sleep interventions also help to improve the mental health and quality of life of parents.

Most children with epilepsy have sleep problems which can trigger seizures and reduce learning ability. We're collaborating with UK researchers to evaluate an [online sleep intervention](#) in children with epilepsy.

[Chronic fatigue syndrome \(CFS\)](#) affects one in 1,000 Australian children and adolescents. We're researching CFS (or [Myalgic Encephalomyelitis](#)) to better [understand the condition](#) and its progression, evaluate interventions and embed evidence-based practice into care.

About 10 per cent of children worldwide snore or have difficulty breathing while asleep. This can cause sleepless nights, plus behaviour and concentration problems during the day. Our research has found that a [saline \(salt water\) nasal spray](#) is just as effective as anti-inflammatory steroid nasal sprays at easing sleep-disordered breathing in children after six weeks of treatment. The follow-up [MIST+ Trial](#) will explore long-term outcomes and whether certain children will benefit more from using the steroid or saline spray.

Alongside [The Royal Children's Hospital Respiratory Department](#), we're assessing the usefulness and acceptability of [sleep studies via telemedicine](#) for patients at home.

Our research involves various projects to better understand and improve sleep in different groups. One project looks at developing reference ranges for infant sleep during sleep studies, while another looks at differences between hospital studies and home studies in paediatrics. We are determining the best CPAP pressure for home use and looking at ways to improve sleep for hospitalised patients.

Over the past decade, we've been part of achondroplasia trials, studying how bone-lengthening medication affects sleep in this group.

With support from the MRFF, we study sleep in people with developmental disabilities.

For our future studies on sleep, we'd like to investigate the impact that lack of sleep has on parents. Adolescent, child and paediatric sleep problems can affect parents' relationships with their child and partner, cause tension and be a health issue.

Impacts of our research

Impacts of our research

- Based on over two decades of research, we developed six books for children aged three to eight years – each focusing on an evidence-based sleep strategy. The [Sleep with Kip™](#) stories are a fun and friendly way to learn to manage common sleep problems in children.
- We've produced a [podcast series to identify sleep problems](#) and improve sleep in babies through to teenagers.
- We found that severely [unsettled babies](#) who experience infant sleep issues are more likely to have mental health problems in childhood. Additionally, poor [mental health during pregnancy](#) is linked to severe [baby sleep problems](#).



- As leaders in infant sleep research, we've found effective techniques and developed [sleep resources for early childhood educators](#) to support [safe sleep](#) and [health professionals](#) to support families managing babies.
- Our suite of sleep interventions and strategies including a [smartphone app](#) and digital education program have been implemented worldwide. Our trials show they reduce sleep and behavioural problems in children and improve parents'

mental health.

- Our [Baby Business booklet](#) helps reduce infant [sleeping and crying problems](#) and improve [mothers' sleep and depression](#). They provide strategies to help babies resettle without always feeding or rocking them to sleep. The strategies are safe and have no long-term harmful effects. The program is now the intervention for the eight-month Maternal and Child Health visit and is available online for practitioners globally.
- Our sleep trial of 25 nurse home visits in a baby's first two years is proving successful and could transform maternal and child health service delivery.
- We revealed how crucial it is to get children snoozing earlier and found [extra sleep](#) can reduce a [child's weight](#).
- We've contributed to [guidelines to improve sleep in children](#) with achondroplasia (dwarfism) and [cerebral palsy](#).
- Our [interventions for children with ADHD](#) and [autism improve sleep, behaviour and parental mental health](#) and are being implemented in the community.

Our vision

Our vision

Our goal is to help children sleep by promoting and enabling good sleeping habits from infancy to adolescence. This will help them live their best life and transform the lives of their parents and families.

Donate to MCRI

Help our researchers make life-changing discoveries in child health.

Donate now

Sleep newsroom



Latest News

New study tracks effects of world first social media ban on teens

Australian teenagers are being sought for a new study that will monitor the impact of a world...

[Read more](#)



Latest News

Upskilling pharmacists in child health care

Pharmacists in Australia will be upskilled to provide advice to families on some of the biggest...

[Read more](#)



Latest News

Students' blood pressure checked in the classroom

Primary school children's blood pressure is checked in the classroom as part of a new program...

[Read more](#)

01 02 03 ... 12

Related research at MCRI

[Health Services and Economics](#)

[Clinical paediatrics](#)

[Neurodisability & rehabilitation](#)



References & acknowledgments

Share //



+61 3 8341 6200

1300 766 439

The Royal Children's Hospital
Flemington Road, Parkville
Victoria 3052 Australia

ABN | 21 006 566 972

About MCRI

[Careers](#)

[Students](#)

[Media centre](#)

[Contact us](#)

[Legal](#)

[Feedback & whistleblowing](#)

Resources

[Find an expert](#)

[A-Z child and adolescent health](#)

[Innovation opportunities](#)

[Bequests](#)

[Sign up to MCRI news](#)

[Privacy policy](#) - [Terms & conditions](#) - [MCRI Policy portal](#) - [Site map](#)

Follow MCRI

Acknowledgement of Country

Murdoch Children's Research Institute acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which we are located. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

© Murdoch Children's Research Institute 2026. All rights reserved.

