



# Sleep and autism

A good night's sleep is important for everyone; however, many Autistic people have trouble falling and staying asleep.

Understanding and supporting the unique sleep needs of Autistic individuals can enhance overall quality of life.

This information sheet offers insights into these challenges and practical suggestions for achieving better sleep.

**Our purpose**  
**a different brilliant®**

Understanding, engaging & celebrating the strengths, interests & aspirations of people on the autism spectrum.

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## Common sleep challenges for Autistic people

- **Settling and winding down:** Many Autistic people find it hard to calm down and prepare for sleep due to anxiety or sensitivity to environmental factors, such as light or noise.
- **Varied sleep patterns:** Autistic individuals may have unique sleep-wake cycles that differ from neurotypical people, which can influence daily routines (e.g. work or school) and quality of life.
- **Sensory sensitivity:** Sensitivities to certain sounds, lights or textures can disrupt sleep.

**With appropriate strategies and support, improved sleep is achievable and can significantly benefit daily functioning and health.**



## Practical sleep strategies

Tailored approaches can significantly improve sleep quality for Autistic people including:

- **Personalised bedtime routines:** Establishing a comforting routine that might include listening to calming music, reading or other relaxing activities can ease the transition to sleep.
- **Creating a comfortable sleep environment:** Adjust the room to reduce sensory disturbances that may include using earplugs, blackout curtains, cosy bedding, sound machines or changing wall colours to something soothing.
- **Melatonin use:** Some Autistic people benefit from melatonin, a natural sleep aid, to regulate sleep patterns. Always consult with a healthcare provider to determine the best approach.
- **Maintain consistent schedules:** Keeping a regular sleep schedule assists the body's internal clock, promoting more stable sleep.
- **Mindful pre-sleep routine:** Activities should wind down before bedtime. Limit exposure to bright screens from TVs, computers or smartphones as they can inhibit melatonin production.
- **Professional consultation:** If sleep challenges persist, consider seeking advice from professionals who specialise in sleep and understand autism. They can provide tailored advice that respects each individual's needs.

## More tips

- **Sleep diaries:** Tracking sleep patterns through a sleep diary can assist in identifying what helps or hinders sleep. This information can be useful for healthcare providers.
- **Diet considerations:** Address food sensitivities or gastrointestinal discomfort that may impact sleep by consulting with a dietitian or doctor. Limit caffeine and stimulants, particularly before bedtime.
- **Natural remedies:** If considering natural sleep aids, discuss these with your healthcare provider to avoid interactions with other medications.

## Additional resources

**Autism CRC:** [autismcrc.com.au/knowledge-centre/resource/sleep-and-young-autistic-adults](https://autismcrc.com.au/knowledge-centre/resource/sleep-and-young-autistic-adults)

**Latrobe University:** [latrobe.edu.au/otarc/research/health-wellbeing](https://latrobe.edu.au/otarc/research/health-wellbeing)

**Monash University:** [lens-monash-edu.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/lens.monash.edu/2023/01/25/1385366/bedtime-strategies-for-kids-with-autism-and-adhd-can-help-all-families-get-more-sleep](https://lens-monash-edu.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/lens.monash.edu/2023/01/25/1385366/bedtime-strategies-for-kids-with-autism-and-adhd-can-help-all-families-get-more-sleep)

**National Autistic Society (UK):** [autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/physical-health/sleep](https://autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/physical-health/sleep)

**Raising Children Network:** [raisingchildren.net.au/autism/health-wellbeing/sleep/sleep-problems-children-with-asd](https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/health-wellbeing/sleep/sleep-problems-children-with-asd)

**Sleep Foundation:** [sleepfoundation.org/physical-health/autism-and-sleep](https://sleepfoundation.org/physical-health/autism-and-sleep)

## Based on the idea of a different brilliant®, Aspect's approach:

- Respects difference and diversity
- Builds a person's skills based on their strengths, interests, aspirations and support needs
- Develops autism-friendly environments
- Supports others to understand and embrace autism and to develop respectful supportive interactions.