

# Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder: ASD & Sleep Fact Sheet

## ASD & Sleep



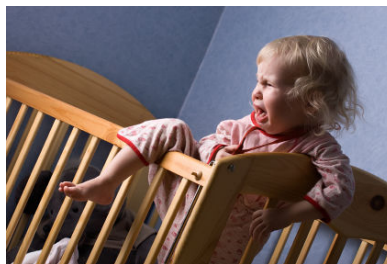
Problems with sleep are very common, affecting 50% or more of those with ASD, and tend to be more chronic compared to individuals without ASD. Sleep disturbances can impact health, behavior, attention, cognition, and school or work performance. Some research has also suggested that more significant ASD symptoms and more challenging behaviors co-

occur with sleep problems. Sleep problems in ASD also affect the family and are associated with increased parental stress and interruption in sibling sleep. Although more marked sleep impairment tends to be noted in younger children with ASD, problems with sleep often persist into adolescence and adulthood.



## Common Sleep Related Problems in ASD

- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Waking up too early
- Daytime sleepiness
- Bedtime resistance
- Adherence to repetitive/ ritualistic bedtime routines
- Night terrors
- Possible sleep walking or talking



- Fewer hours of sleep are associated with more social skills deficits, communication problems, stereotyped behavior and adherence to non-functional routines
- Sleep problems also relate to higher rates of over-activity, disruptive behaviors, noncompliance, aggression, and irritability

# Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder: ASD & Sleep Fact Sheet

## What Help is Available?

Behavioral interventions are very effective for improving adaptive sleep behaviors and are recommended as first-line treatments for sleep problems in individuals with ASD. It is important to consult with a medical provider to rule out medical conditions that could lead to poor sleep before beginning behavioral intervention. Behavioral interventions may be provided by a community behavioral health provider, such as a psychologist or clinical social worker, behavior analyst, or appropriately trained physician. Behavioral interventions may include gradually fading bedtime, scheduled awakenings to increase periods of uninterrupted sleep, monitoring the child and checking on a schedule rather than in response to problem behavior, and positive bedtime routines. If sleep does not improve following behavioral intervention, melatonin supplementation may help reduce the time it takes to fall asleep, increase duration of sleep, and reduce awakenings. Use of melatonin should be discussed with a medical provider.

## Select References

- Chtistodulu, K. V., & Durand, V. M. (2004). Reducing bedtime disturbance and night waking using positive bedtime routines and sleep restriction. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 19*(3), 130-139.
- Cohen, S., Conduit, R., Lockley, S. W., Rajaratnam, S. M. W., & Cornish, K. M. (2014). The relationship between sleep and behavior in autism spectrum disorder (ASD): A review. *Journal of Neurodevelopmental Disorders, 6*(44), 1-10.
- Herrmann, S. (2016). Counting sheep: Sleep disorders in children with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care, 30*(2), 143-154. doi: 10.1016/j.pedhc.2015.07.003
- Turner, K. S., & Johnson, C. R. (2012). Behavioral interventions to address sleep disturbances in children with autism spectrum disorders: A review. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 33*(3), 144-152. doi: 10.1177/0271121412446204

The Binghamton Regional Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders (BRCASD), located on the Binghamton University campus in Binghamton, NY, is one of the seven regional centers affiliated with the New York State Regional Centers for Autism Spectrum Disorders (NYSRCASD). Our mission is to provide low-to-no cost evidence-based education and training for families, educators, and community professionals to improve services and outcomes for youth with ASD (ages 4-21). We serve Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Otsego, Tioga, and Tompkins counties.

For more information about BRCASD, please contact us.

Toll free: 1-855-423-3212

Email: [brcasd@binghamton.edu](mailto:brcasd@binghamton.edu)

Website: [brcasd.binghamton.edu](http://brcasd.binghamton.edu)