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 overactivity, disruptive behaviors, noncompliance, aggression, and irritability

For more information about the Binghamton Regional Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders, please contact us. Toll free: 1-855-423-3212   Email: brcasd@binghamton.edu   Website: brcasd.binghamton.edu
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


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.

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