



KIDZZZSLEEP

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Night (Sleep) Terrors

- Night terrors are benign (not harmful) sleep behavior, but they may cause a lot of anxiety for parents. Night terrors are fairly common in children. Night terrors and sleepwalking often ruin families. Most children outgrow night terrors by adolescence.
- Night terrors occur during the stage of sleep called slow wave deep sleep. This sleep stage is most frequent in the early part (first third) of the night. Although a child having a night terror may appear awake, she is really asleep.
- Night terrors in children are not a sign of psychological problems. However, there are certain things, like stress, that make it more likely for someone who is prone to night terrors to have an episode. These include:
 - not getting enough sleep
 - an irregular sleep schedule
 - fever, illness
 - some medications
 - sleeping with a full bladder
 - sleeping in a different environment
 - a noisy sleeping environment
- A child having a night terror may have her eyes open, but usually appears very agitated, frightened and even panicked as well as confused and dazed during an episode. A child will often cry out or scream at the beginning of the night terror and may mumble or give inappropriate answers to questions. A child having a night terror is often clumsy and may flail around, push a parent away, or behave in other strange ways.
- Occasionally, children with night terrors get up out of bed, and can injure themselves during an episode. The sleeping environment should be made as safe as possible to avoid accidental injury. Floors should not be cluttered, objects should not be left on the stairs, hallways should be lit. Some parents keep their child with night terrors confined to the bedroom by securely fashioning a screen door or high gate to the child's

bedroom door.

- The child who is having a night terror should be gently restrained to keep her safe. Talk quietly and calmly to your child. Generally, nothing is gained by trying to awaken a child during a night terror and sometimes doing so can make the child more agitated.
- If she spontaneously awakens after the night terror (which children and adolescents often do), avoid teasing!
- Children with night terrors are not aware of their behavior and will not remember the night terror the next morning. Don't mention it in the morning, unless asked by the child.
- Children with nightly or very frequent night terrors may benefit from a treatment called scheduled awakening. This technique involves fully awakening your child 30-45 minutes before the time the night terror usually occurs. This seems to interrupt sleep cycles and decrease the chances of having a night terror.
- Relaxation techniques, including relaxation tapes at bedtime may also help prevent night terrors.
- Rarely, children with very frequent or severe night terrors may need to be treated with a brief period of bedtime medication like Valium.

If you have any questions about your child's night terrors, or sleep in general, contact your doctor.

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593 Eddy Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: 401.444.1614 Fax: 401.444.6218
www.kidzzzsleeeep.org

Last modified: Sunday, May 21, 2006