

SCIENCE & WELLNESS

Worried About Your Kids Not Getting Enough Sleep? Climate Change Could Make it Worse.

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If you thought struggling to get your kids to sleep at night wasn't hard enough, experts predict that it's only going to get worse with climate change. The planet's average surface temperature has risen about 2.0 degrees Fahrenheit since the late 19th century. This change is largely due to carbon dioxide and other human-made emissions in the atmosphere. Most of this warming has happened over the past 35 years, with 16 of the 17 warmest years on record occurring since 2001.

Not only was 2016 the warmest year on record, but eight of the 12 months that year were the warmest on record. As the world's climate continues to warm, with average global temperatures expected to rise 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit by 2050, we are surely going to feel the impact. A new study looks at how these rising temperatures are already affecting how we sleep.



The study published in Science Advances by Nick Obradovich of the Harvard University's Kennedy School explores the relationship between climate change and sleep patterns. It is the largest real-world study to identify a relationship between insufficient sleep and unusually warm nighttime temperatures.

To conduct the study, the research team compared data from 750,000 individuals in the United States between 2002 and 2011 who responded to a public health survey, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The researchers then linked data about people not sleeping well to daily temperature data from the National Centers for Environmental Information. Finally, they combined the effects of the warm temperatures on sleep with climate model projections by NASA Earth Exchange.

Ultimately, they discovered that there is a direct correlation between just one degree increase in night temperature and cases of restless sleep. According to the findings, warmer temperatures could cause six additional nights of inadequate sleep per 100 individuals by 2050 and approximately 14 extra nights per 100 people by 2099.

If climate change is not addressed, temperatures by 2050 could cost people in the United States millions of additional sleepless nights each year. That means that a bad night's sleep could be twice as common in 2050 as it is now. By 2099 the figure could rise by several hundred million more nights of lost sleep annually.

Why sleep is so important for our kids

One of our most important jobs as parents is to make sure our kids get a good night's sleep. Besides keeping a child's temper in balance, sleep provides so many essential benefits for our growing children. While asleep, children process and absorb what they have learned. Some studies have even found that sleep improves a child's intelligence and memory. Sleep also allows a child's body to recover and repair itself, and of course to grow.

Sleep plays a big role in managing mood and lack of sleep can lead to an increase in negative behaviors like anxiety, impatience, aggression, irritability, and poor school performance. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, poor sleep has been shown to significantly worsen the symptoms of many mental health issues including anxiety. When children and teens don't get enough sleep, they can experience headaches, nausea, muscle soreness, tremors, slurred speech, or dizziness. Finally, sleep has also been linked to a whole host of health issues like weight gain, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and a weak immune system.

So, how is temperature related to sleep? Our children's bedroom temperature can play a huge role in how easily they fall asleep and then stay asleep through the night. Children sleep most comfortably in a room with a temperature between 65 to 70 degrees, according to [Babycenter.com](#). If the room is too warm, they will struggle to get to sleep.

Our body actually needs to cool down before we can fall asleep. Experts in a Wall Street Journal article explain that the temperature of our body's core – our brain and abdominal cavity – needs – to drop by about 2 to 3 degrees Fahrenheit to allow us to fall to sleep. If our core temperature is too high, then our brain is unable to transition from being awake to being asleep. In fact, specific brain cells located in the hypothalamus sense temperature changes to control sleep.

Believe it or not, even if you have an air conditioner, you can still be affected by outside temperature fluctuations that can disturb your sleep. Of course, people who do not have air conditioning will struggle more with sleeping as temperatures continue to creep up due to climate change.

Wondering how much sleep your kids need? WebMD suggests the following guidelines:

1-3 Years Old: 12-14 hours per day. Toddlers need up to 14 hours a day of sleep, but typically get only about 10. Most children from about 21 to 36 months old still need one nap a day, which may range from 1 to 3.5 hours long. They typically go to bed between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. and wake up between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m.

3-6 Years Old: 10-12 hours per day. Children at this age typically go to bed between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. and wake up around 6 a.m. and 8 a.m.

7-12 Years Old: 10-11 hours per day. Bedtimes gradually become later and later, with most 12 year olds going to bed around 9 p.m. The average amount of sleep at this age is only about 9 hours.

Five ways for your family to address climate change

A good night's sleep is certainly worth protecting. Here are some ways that you can reduce your family's carbon footprint to prevent climate change from getting worse.

- Teach your kids to appreciate and respect the natural environment by [spending time outdoors](#), visiting science museums, and [reading books together](#) about climate change.
- Walk, bike, carpool, take public transportation, or drive an electric car.
- Eat organic and locally grown food, and less meat.
- Switch to clean energy for your home.
- Cut your waste, and recycle or reuse the waste that you produce.

For more ideas, check out [How to Double Down on These 8 Environmentally Conscious Efforts](#).



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