



Supporting Special Olympics Athletes in Getting a Good Night's Sleep

What is this Snapshot about?

Good quality [sleep is important](#) for everyone but it can be especially important for athletes to maintain their health, performance, and general well-being. For some people, getting a good night's sleep is something they take for granted but many people struggle to get enough sleep each night. They might have insomnia, a busy schedule, or not understand the importance of prioritizing sleep.

Why Does Sleep Matter?

- **Improves Learning and Retention:** During sleep, the brain consolidates memories and learning from the day. This means that sleep directly affects how well athletes remember and apply skills learned during training. Athletes who sleep well are more focused and able to retain new techniques.
- **Supports Emotional Regulation:** Sleep is essential for managing emotions, stress, and anxiety. An athlete who sleeps well is better equipped to handle the pressures of competition and daily life. Poor sleep can increase irritability, stress, and make it harder to recover from setbacks.
- **Promotes Physical Health:** Sleep supports physical health by boosting immune function and regulating the body's metabolism. Sleep also aids in the body's recovery process, which is vital for athletes who push their bodies to the limit during training and competitions. Lack of sleep can increase the risk of illnesses or injuries, and inhibit normal recovery.

How much Sleep is needed?

Quality sleep is an essential component of an athlete's overall health and performance.

According to [Canada's first-ever 24-Hour Movement Guidelines](#) by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP), adults aged 18-64 years should

aim for 7 to 9 hours of good-quality sleep on a regular basis, with consistent bed and wake-up times. Ensuring that your athletes prioritize sufficient sleep will enhance their ability to recover, focus, and perform at their best during practices and competitions. Though 7 to 9 hours is a good guideline, the exact need may vary depending on the athlete.

How can Families Support Quality Sleep?

Families can play an active role in supporting their athlete's sleep by ensuring their athlete have a quiet and comfortable environment for rest, supporting a consistent bedtime routine, and reducing stress factors that may interfere with sleep.



5 Tips to Support Quality Sleep

1. Create a Calming Evening Routine

Help establish a routine that prepares your athlete for sleep. Strategies such as limiting screen time before bed, calming music, and dimming lights can all signal to the brain that it is time to wind down.

2. Support Consistency in Sleep Schedules

[Encourage a consistent sleep-wake schedule](#). This may be something that is hard for athletes who may have unpredictable and changing schedules, but when possible, it is important to create a consistent schedule. Going to bed and waking up at the same time every day helps create good sleep habits and supports routine. Some people like to use their phones or smart watches to help track their sleep and remind them when to start winding down. There are also tools such as [sleep charts](#) that may be helpful to monitor your family member's sleep.

3. Promote a Healthy Sleep Environment

Work together to make your athlete's bedroom a "sleep sanctuary", this may include - reducing clutter, ensuring comfortable bedding, and maintaining a cool, dark environment. Some people find it helpful to keep phones and tablets outside of the bedroom.

4. Encourage Physical Activities

Physical activities can help regulate sleep patterns and promote better rest at night. Luckily, athletes already have this built in on some days! On days without a practice or game, encourage athletes to get in the habit of including other physical activities. For example, going for a short walk in the morning or after dinner.

5. Help your Athlete Understand the Importance of Sleep

Talk with your athlete about why adequate sleep is important - we know that sleep enhances physical performance, cognitive function, and emotional regulation. Use examples of how lack of sleep can lead to injuries and reduced focus. The good news is that being active during the day can help people get a good night's sleep!

Additional Resources

For more information on why sleep is important and additional tips on how to get a good night's sleep, you can read this [Article](#). For Canadian statistics on sleep, check out this [Link](#).

About the Team

This family snapshot was written by Dr. Janet McCabe and students from the Ontario Tech nursing program. This project was led by Dr. Avra Selick from CAMH, together with Special Olympics Canada athletes, caregivers, coaches, researchers and community partners from across the country.

About H-CARDD

[Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities \(H-CARDD\)](#)

is a research program that aims to enhance the overall health and well-being of people with developmental disabilities through improved health care policy and services.

H-CARDD research is conducted by dedicated teams of scientists, policymakers, health care providers, people with disabilities and families working collaboratively.

This study was funded by Special Olympics Canada. No endorsement by the funders or collaborators is intended or should be inferred.