

# What Children's Hospitals Are Doing to Optimize Sleep for Kids

*By Paige Towers • June 3, 2016 at 1:26pm*

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For sick children, the transition to a hospital setting — and all its alarms, beeps and needle pricks — can be jarring, particularly at night.

Instead of a lamp or nightlight, children's hospital rooms are equipped with fluorescent overhead lights. Young patients are awoken for baths or vitals checks at various points in the night instead of sleeping the long set of hours

they require. The oncequiet routine of being tucked in and read a bedtime story is replaced by doctors, nurses and other hospital staff appearing at their bedside to perform examinations or administer medication.

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that's so important for their brain development. And that's optimizing their sleep."

Yet, as reported recently by Shefali Luthra for the NPR article,

“Bright Lights, Big Hassles For Children in the Hospital,”

children's hospitals across the country are adopting strategies to transform their wards into more relaxing, sleep friendly places hospital administrators hope sees improve outcomes for their youngest patients.

“If we're going to try to heal kids, we need to try to have them do the one thing that's so important for their brain development,” said Dr. Sapna Kudchadkar,

an assistant professor of anesthesiology, critical care and pediatrics at Johns Hopkins Children's Center in Baltimore. “And that's optimizing their sleep.”

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The strategies for promoting better rest for young patients are varied. Some hospitals are shifting common tasks like bathing to only daylight hours, or making nurses aware of issues by sending a message to their cellphones instead of having machines loudly alert the entire floor.

Other strategies include encouraging children to play during afternoon hours instead of evenings, clustering exams and blood draws to all take place at one set time, or turning on white noise machines at night to block out some of the chatter and noise.

These extensive changes will affect the families of sick kids as well. As Lisa Meltzer,

associate professor of pediatrics at National Jewish Health in Denver, told NPR, sleepdeprived and overstimulated parents are more likely to mishear or misremember instructions for administering medications to their children.

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“There’s more evidence really showing a direct link between insufficient and poor quality sleep and negative outcomes,” Meltzer said.

Administrators at such hospitals as John Hopkins and National Jewish Health hope that these strategies will not only lead to improved Zzzs and health outcomes for young patients, but will also serve as a model for other children’s hospitals looking to create more natural, soothing environments.

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