

# Sleep

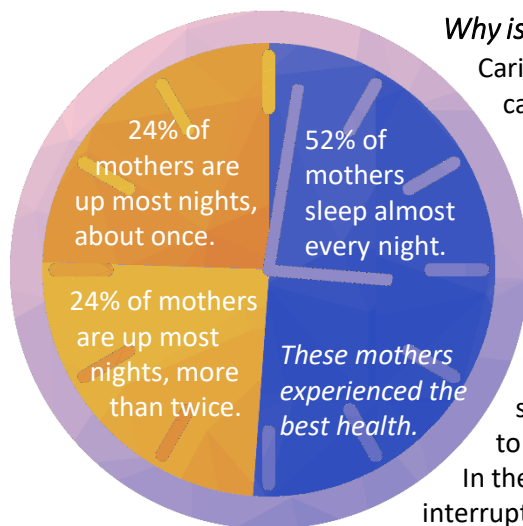
*Research findings for mothers (Bourke-Taylor PhD©)*



This fact sheet reports on research findings that identified sleep interruptions as a major contributor to maternal stress (Bourke-Taylor, 2019). Throughout the parenting journey, mothers experience night-time waking to care for their child. For mothers of children with a disability, caring activities during the night can continue into the long-term, which can negatively impact on sleep. Many mothers may also find that stress can decrease their ability to fall and stay asleep, or that their quality of sleep is poor.

## What does the evidence suggest?

Research by Bourke-Taylor with mothers of children with a disability asked mothers about sleep interruptions and night-time care provided for their child, and how this influenced their health. The research found that sleep interruptions were associated with poorer mental health and well-being (see figure below). The mothers with the most sleep interruptions were the least active during the day and had a child with the highest care needs.



## Why is sleep important?

Caring for a child involves some complex activities, including direct care tasks, planning and organising. Sleep interruptions can cause ongoing fatigue, poor concentration or memory issues that may make caring more difficult on some days. Sleep is important for your health and well-being. Sleep is important to replenish your energy reserves so that you can provide the care that your child and family needs.

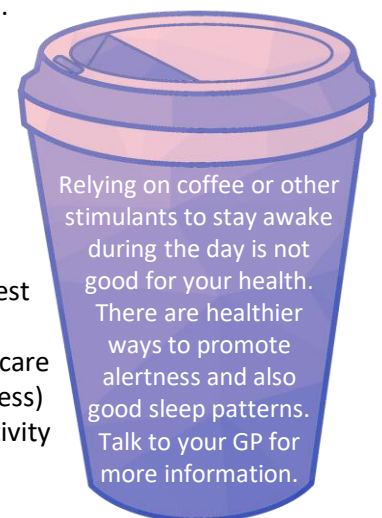
Sleep is a luxury for many mothers. Many children with disabilities need night-time care for their health, well-being or safety. This can place parents under a 24 hour care cycle. It is hard to sustain usual daily activities without sleep.

In the research, 48% of mothers had interrupted sleep as the child's care took priority.

## So what can I do?

If you have a child with high or essential night-time care needs, consider options such as:

- daytime rests
- occasional care for your child at night or during the day so you can sleep or rest
- sharing night-time care with another family member
- investigating technology and equipment that may reduce or ease night-time care (i.e. toileting equipment, night lights, intercoms or a pressure relieving mattress)
- speak to your child's teacher or healthcare team for ideas (i.e. more child activity during the day or a safe quiet activity that will enable you to rest).



Solutions for sleep interruptions are often individually crafted for families with children/young people with night-time care needs. Other families in similar situations may offer great ideas on how sleep interruptions can be managed to reduce the impact on parents.

**Find ways to improve your sleep by sharing care, using technology or individualising sleep arrangements to suit your family.**

**Aim for better sleep by building supports around you and seeking advice to individualise a plan for your family.**

Visit our website at <http://www.healthymothers-healthyfamilies.com/> for references and more information.

If this fact sheet has raised any concerns, please seek medical advice from your local GP. Alternatively, please call LifeLine on 13 11 14 or Carers Australia, who can provide short-term counselling and emotional support for carers and families, on 1800 242 636.